

THE GLAMOUR  
OF THE EARTH

No 3818.114





MAR 10 S

MAR 15 O

MAR 24 ~~X~~

APR 30 S

NOV 10

OF MAY 8









THE GLAMOUR  
OF THE EARTH









Allen & Co. So.



*Hills of God.*



# THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

BY

GEORGE A. B. DEWAR

AUTHOR OF "THE BIRDS IN OUR WOOD," "WILD LIFE  
IN HAMPSHIRE HIGHLANDS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY R. W. A. ROUSE

THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH  
BY GEORGE A. B. DEWAR  
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY R. W. A. ROUSE

LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD

1904

[All rights reserved]

C

Feb. 26. 1914  
R

WALL CLIFF  
287 45  
KOTZBACH

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.  
At the Ballantyne Press

TO

*MY WIFE*

*“O world, as God has made it ! all is beauty,  
And knowing this is love and love is duty  
What further need be sought for or declared ?”*





# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH . . . .	1
II. AT FALL . . . . .	25
III. LITTLE BIRDS IN MINIATURE . . . .	35
IV. STRAY FEATHERS . . . . .	58
V. THE SECRET WOOD . . . . .	78
VI. DAYS FROM THE WOOD DIARY . . . .	105
VII. HILLS OF GOD . . . . .	138
VIII. THE GARDEN . . . . .	163
IX. THE SHINING RIVER . . . . .	192
X. IN THE VILLAGE PORTRAIT GALLERY . .	225





# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

HILLS OF GOD ( <i>Photogravure</i> ) . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
HEADING TO CHAPTER I . . . . .	PAGE I
"        "    II . . . . .	25
"        "    III . . . . .	35
"        "    IV . . . . .	58
"        "    V . . . . .	78
"THE GREEN DEEPS" ( <i>Photogravure</i> ) . .	<i>To face</i> 104
HEADING TO CHAPTER VI . . . . .	105
"        "    VII . . . . .	138
"HIS UNYOKED PATIENT TEAM" ( <i>Photogravure</i> )	<i>To face</i> 140
HEADING TO CHAPTER VIII . . . . .	163
"        "    IX . . . . .	192
A HAMLET OF DOOMSDAY ( <i>Photogravure</i> ) .	<i>To face</i> 200
HEADING TO CHAPTER X . . . . .	225





# THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

## CHAPTER I

### THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

THE great spell which the earth casts over those that love it is never broken. It may not always be of the same power. Something hangs on the state of the health of our mind and body; on whether or not we are detached enough from the fret of "the world" to answer swift and sure to the touch. Sometimes it does not take an hour when we reach the deep wood, or the river that shines, to unload the lesser cares which

## 2 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

for a while past we have nursed, as though they were dear things: but there is no surety of so speedy a release as this: now and then whole long days will be spent among choice scenes in delicious weather before the chord of life, that has been too sharply screwed, can recover: there have been hard summer hours when the high-perched yellow-hammer in the great beech tree in the garden has been a burthen with his monotony that at most times delights me, and the cirl bunting's plaint over her fledged and flown young has pierced at the nerves. Many have felt these disappointments, have been even gnawed at a little by a fear lest the power to enjoy to the full should be paralysed, not for this day or tomorrow alone, but for the whole future. Insensibly the burthen slides from the uneasy bearer, and the spell is over him again, strong as life.

But, apart from these matters of health and of freedom from care, there are times when the spell or glamour of the earth is felt to be more masterful and intense than ordinarily. The kindling spring, with its first flowers and tumult of birds, is probably the time when men feel most under the influence. By-and-by comes the wonderful crowded week or fortnight, commonly in late May and early June, which puts the finishing strokes to the making of midsummer; when by light and dark, in rain and shine, the earth is fairly throbbing with energy, and each sappy holt and even the dustiest hedgerow by the most

## THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH 3

beaten highway is in a sort of ecstasy of life. These are the two prime seasons in our year when the passion for the earth is at its height. The early spring feeling is no doubt in some degree one of reaction. The tradition that winter is the dead and dismal time is deep-rooted: it is horrid winter, the sad season, and the first signs of life awakened are hailed with joy the greater through long waiting for them. In part then spring is so longed for, and so good to the senses when it comes, because of the months that have gone before; whereas the week or fortnight that leads up to the perfect summer makes its more intrinsic appeal to us not for what went before, or for what comes after, but simply through its teeming life and abundance of good sights, sounds, and smells. But only in part is this true of the spring. For men long for the feel of an English spring in countries where they have not known the rigour of winter. And, again, those who find beauty and interest in the country in every winter day yet feel the glamour of the earth strongest on them when April comes. More and more we find the earth drawing us at the fall of the year and throughout the winter; but as much as ever, if not more, have spring in the blood when the sap begins to stir.

The spot where now we watch the course of the seasons, and feel the spell of the earth strong in each, is some fifteen miles from the home in



#### 4 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

the great wood of oaks and hazels whose atmosphere and wild life I tried to describe a few years ago. It is fifteen miles of hill and vale, with such thatched villages as Birket Foster drew in his matchless detail. But it has its massy ridged downs, too, aloof spots at most times, with severe bitten-out sky-lines, and undulating forms that impress one with the sense of a land which must have taken unthinkable years in the solemn business of making.

It is a land of lanes. The lanes have elms which are quite different from the elms that often grow stiffly in the hedges round sad fields of rhubarb and cabbage about the fringe of a city. Our elms never seem stiff, or placed artificially; rather, scattered here and there at random, as the oaks sown by Nature in the wilder woods. They spread their branches where they will, and the effect is beautiful. It is the lopped and trimmed elm that is an eyesore to a watcher of trees. Almost every lane in this piece of England has its elms; almost every village and hidden hamlet has the tree, either the common form or the wych. The first is, I think, the better to look at, for the untold variety of shape in its limbs and masses of foliage and outline. Among them, here and there, high in the hills, more often low in the hollow and the little valley, you see the ash-gray shingled spire of an Early English church with its pointed arch, the most uplifting of the great, simple forms

## THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH 5

of Gothic genius. To this fifteen miles of idyll, water exquisite in purity is not wanting. The brook takes its rise in the meadows by the most hidden hamlet of all, just a church, a parsonage, a schoolhouse, and three or four old cottages; it swiftly gathers from unseen wells in the green; it trickles amongst its cresses, and, having threaded its way through kingfisher haunts for a mile or so, can turn a wheel. After, it is a stream. We follow it for miles: then leave it for a while to toil up a long, very lonely road, at the top of which, for the first time on the journey, are seen the woods, frowning dark on the horizon: this is a view that never fails to move the heart: then down to another valley still smaller, through which a winterbourne flows, presently to make of the stream a little river. Sometimes for years the winterbourne dries up or flows only for a few weeks. But now it races so full that even the ancients of the villages by its uppermost sources are hard put to recall so strong a stream. The great white sponge deep under the downs is heavy with its stores, but pays these out in a way very different from water sources in steeper countries. It sucks in the rains slowly and surely: it wastes nothing in flood or spate. Only after a very great rainfall will it be lavish: then it sends out water to slide under rotting old hatches, which perhaps have not been used for decades past, to fill carrier and dyke, through which

## 6 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

the villagers had almost forgot that water ever coursed; to draw the mallard from miles away.

With its untainted springs of water and its strong air that cures, its glory of colour in summer, its endless, endless gradation of tint and tone in winter, such a land seems one to live in every day in the year, if we wish for these things. Why leave it often for days together in summer and spring, perhaps for a still longer stretch in winter, if sheer necessity does not drive one into unlovely and peopled places? This is a question I have sometimes put to myself in a state of protest when the train has been taking me from the wood or garden at a time at which these urge a longer stay. What good is it to go? It is hard at the hour when the wrench is keenly felt to take any answer given by reason to this hot question of the heart. However, there is a wise answer or two. To discipline oneself counts in life: and it is discipline of the severest to leave wood or garden in the heyday for a city. And there are other compensations, as sure as any that Emerson dwelt upon, in this way of alternating the largely natural life with the largely artificial; though they may not have quite the altruism of his. The eye for Nature will not see the country as Crabbe often did: the ugly side cannot be uppermost for the lover of Nature, because of the beauty for him in land and sky and flowers and streams: the tragedy and doom of all life

## THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH 7

which have so pressed upon a great artist that he has seen them mirrored even in deformed wood growths, twisted and baulked of their sun and air—these are not real to the heart alert for beauty. And yet it is not to be denied that there is an unlovely side to life in the fairest stretch of country. Pettiness is here, of course; business is here, that robs the mind of serenity when we become interested in it, and takes us from the lanes and downs and their choice life and colour. The rate, the assessment committee, for instance, are real enough. You could scarcely live, even in Arcady, always, and yet not become involved in the like. By the other method we can and do live, whilst in Arcady, apart from them. We leave business for the town. Here is good compensation for the precious days spent away from the best scenes and things. The ethics of looking away from the unbeautiful side of country life, if one has the power to do so, to the beautiful, I am not considering; only a way by which it may be done—but it is certain that good and wise men have resolutely looked away.

It is not in the wilder and lonelier spots in a land like this that we look for the first spring things. The downs are swept by keen winds, so that March and April in such places have scarcely more of the sense of spring than January. It is chary of its coming, too, in the low-lying open ground by the water; though

## 8 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

marsh-marigold and butterbur that pushes up in swampy spots, and if there are good willows the smell and shower of their gold dust, early in a mild April, will be among the shrivelled sedge grasses and the ruined pipy stem of umbel-headed water-flowers and ragged reed beds. Almost slower is the spring, I sometimes think, to touch the large woods, though these are not cut so cruelly as meadow and marsh by the wind and frost of the opening months of the year. There are a few primroses, and at long spaces from each other a few thrushes in song; but on and off we have had both these through the autumn and winter. So that the hope of feeling spring early in such places is nearly always somewhat of a disappointment. Thus the places which it first tints and warms are not downs, large woods, or water-ways; rather, the hedgerows and the little spinneys or coppices and embankments, and deep lanes and branch and farm roads about the village or the hamlet. Here is most of the colour and faint scent and song that one seeks in March and early April. I have seen the embankment facing south and steeped in sun so painted in places by violets in March that the very navvies going home from work with their spades and heavy loads of tools at the end of the week have called each others' attention to the flowers; and one of these great fellows, splendid in his physical manhood, in thew and bulk, but with



## THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH 9

the last face in the world into which you would look for an eye for flowers, has ceased rough talk or cards for a few moments to tell another of where there is a wonderful patch of blue. Not all these violets of early spring are the scentless sort, Gerarde's dog violet, though this flower does seem to prefer the sun-steeped spots. We have only to go a few yards outside the wicket gate to find the deeper blue of the scented violets on chillier banks among the creeping ivy. Until lately this blue form of the sweet violet was strange to me except through books. The white form of the flower is far more general under these hedgerows. There is often a famous white violet hedge by a hamlet, and knowledge of where the flowers are to be found, and exactly when in March, seems handed down from generation to generation of cottage child. But these scented violets are much less thickly spread on the earth than the scentless: only in the garden at the root of an old pear tree, I know of white violets in a thick small patch; under the hedges they are dotted about, overlooked by the careless eye. These and the blue sort were the flowers no doubt out of which "violet sugar," that sounds even better than "cowslip preserve," was once made in England, and prescribed for folk with lung troubles.

At this time of violets, and of the musk-scented, lowly moschatel, with its tiny cluster of fine yellow-green flowers, which blossoms in be vies

## 10 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

about some of these March hedges among the little hills on the chalk, the thrush is waxing in song. The excessive repetitions, the harsh and screechy passages, are becoming less noticeable, and sometimes we have from him a fine lyric. At evening, before the storm breaks, I have heard such a lyric from a thrush in March. On a dull still evening, which passed into a wild night, one came into the lilac bushes and sang as it seemed to me I had never heard thrush sing before. He poured out strong mellow notes in such variety that I walked up near to get, if possible, a view of him; with a chatter of protest or excitement he went into the yew, and there continued and ended his song. The spring evening is a very earnest time for these early singing birds: only in the June mornings, when the world is waking, are the thrushes and blackbirds equally fine to hear. There must be sheer transport in early spring for some singers. Several missel-thrushes were hotly chasing each other about the elms of a village on the other side of the downs, and the passion of the season was stirring these birds at the end of February. On a night brilliantly lit by the moon, a friend went out on to his lawn and heard to his amazement a missel-thrush singing like mad at one o'clock. The song must have lasted for upwards of an hour: it struck upon the listener as the overflow of a passion beyond the control of sleep. It is the same state of glory that one sees at this time

## THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH 11

among the skylarks. With crests erect they tilt at each other in the grass, and strike blows that can be distinctly heard at ten or twenty yards distance: they disengage for a minute, one apparently stooping low and hiding from the other; panting from the vehemence of their charges, they run in again on each other and strike more blows. And yet ever and anon one of the fighters will forget his rage, and take flight: and spiring up pours out his exuberant spirit in another way, the way of song.

Next come the wind-flowers, and with them the slow woods awake. In clearings in the coppices, where the underwood shoots, hazel, oak and ash, are of one or two years' growth, these wind-flowers are almost as a white cloth spread over the ground in places. In a premature spring the blossoms are large, their white often flushed with purple. Then the green of the dog's-mercury is as bright as the wood spurge of May. From the high oaks, dancing from tree to tree, comes the beaten-out note, with metallic ring, of the chiff-chaff, first of the summer warblers: the ox-eye's loud "ter bit ter bee" sounds everywhere, and one may find oneself listening for the cuckoo and the willow wren many days before their time. Add to these, ribes, the bee-loved shrub of the April garden; mezereon, daffodil—wild for choice, or long escaped from cultivation, as under the great limes in the wood—sulphur butterfly, and the first bold blue

eggs of the song thrush, and you have a list of some of the commonest of spring things. They colour, or are heard or seen, in almost every English coppice or garden in April: the very hardest spring, full of the east wind and of black frost, has them. Yet year after year their beauty is a fresh revelation. These things are better to refresh the spirit and upraise it than the masterpieces of the supreme men, a Shakespeare or a Pheidias. I never got the good from Shelley's "Skylark"—though I have had my share—that I have from the best thrush's lyric at nightfall, the blackbird's at the June daybreak. What is Shakespeare's bank of wild thyme to set against the thymy ridges of the rolling downs, or Shelley's west wind to the wind that robs the beech hanger of its fire? No glamour which genius commands can compare for a moment with this of the earth. To rank Shelley's skylark and west wind with the bird and the mighty melody which inspired him would be to put literature on a level with life, to take the reflection for the substance. It is impossible to doubt the truth of what Emerson said of man: "He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with Nature in the present, above time." It is only when we feel he is tending to live more and more away from Nature, to be a mere artificer, that there is some reason to look at life as a tragedy or plight.

Is it fanciful to speak of the spring as being of two distinct stages—the freezing spring, and the

growing? The first the season of brilliant sunshine, cold wind and sleet storm during the day, frost following at dark, so that what springs in the light is nipped in the night; the second, balmy, with days of soaking rain and wind from the south or west mingled with days of summer sunshine, to make together the true growing time. There often seems to be a clearer distinction between these stages than between summer and autumn, autumn and winter. By a sudden change we find that we have passed from the freezing spring to the growing. Anemone and white violet and the first chiff-chaff or two we may associate, among these high chalk hills, with the freezing spring: but when the cuckoo calls all day, and has not stopped by seven o'clock on an evening in early May, and the missel-thrush sits hard on her second clutch of eggs, we feel that, frosts or not after dark, we are nearing the wonderful racing period of the year. The days and nights now come when in some years we talk of its being a case of hearing and seeing things wax with life, the earth is so sappy. These are so teeming that things good to see and hear and smell jostle one another in the thoughts when at night we strive to review the events of twelve hours. Only a very few of these crowded sights and sounds can be clearly recalled and kept. One day it was the green of the unfolding tender leaves of the elms set off by the dark, twisted boughs that was the sight of the morning: but a



## 14 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

rarer sight at evening was the oak wood in the valley beneath; between the soaking showers it appeared tinged with red, as if the time were autumn. The oak reddens before it greens, we all know, but we scarcely look for more than a suggestion of red: here was a wood in a hollow flushed red. The day before, the delicate blackcap was in the fast pinking apple tree, at the roots of which, in the grass, chequered fritillaries with May anemones are establishing themselves. No choicer union of bird and bloom can be imagined than blackcap and apple flower, unless it be the thrush, with its bright eyes and dappled breast, singing in an almond tree one mass of pink; but thrush and almond, though I have seen it with joy in England—on a sooty city green—is not quite English; it has an Eastern effect, suggesting Persia.

Summer puts away the hyacinth blue from the coppice; Solomon's seal, too, has gone, before the height and crown of the year is reached; and cowslip from the downs and marigold from the meadow. But the pace is so hot, the press of new-comers so great, that the gap is hardly noticed before filled up, the jungles of green looking denser each day in the last weeks before midsummer. The wild thyme will very soon be worth the bees' visit. The broom in the grass banks is a cloth of gold: this is one of the great flower glows of southern England, sheets of colour on which the sensuous eye simply

feasts: there is no desire to look closely into those glows of colour, to examine with nice eye an individual flower. All we want here is the effect as a whole. The rose of the sainfoin blooms now, outlasting the broom. The charlock's paler yellow is spread so thick on the hillside, we can see it miles away. We must be nearer the crimson clover fields, for distance deadens their colour; but later on, in the summer, a mile off, I have seen the poppy fields blazing. At the very edge of the night not all these sheets of colour have quite lost their glow; last of them, the charlock puts out its light. Even little groups or clumps of some of the yellow summer flowers are bitten-out on the hedge banks after dusk; and thus I have found St. John's wort so vivid in late July that, standing at the garden wicket, I could see distinctly a patch of it on a bank some way up the road, though the dusk was growing into dark. But as evening draws on, instead of the glows of colour among the folds of the hills and about their summits we have those of the sky. The drawn-out sunsets of mid-June bring with them one thought that we desire to put away, for it pricks—the longest day, and so the best day, in the year will be here and gone directly. If June only lasted a year, and life or the more strenuous period of it were in proportion longer! There would be time then, perhaps, to gather up and get a firm grasp of the wonderful things

## 16 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

of this season of colour and scent and song. As it is, our share must be so small; some scattered fragments and not more, of the feast spread out. I suppose that these sunsets of June and July are no better here than in any other part of England; only I never was so conscious of them at other places. After the evening meal, one can go out again into the garden and watch them flushing the west for an hour or more. Lemon and rose will give place to yellow and to flesh tints—though such names do not really describe them; there are no colour names that can—and often these will turn to fire, or a certain smoky red as of a distant city in flame; finally, on a pale ground colour, streaks and fine lines of purple. Then ensues a period of faint glow or suffusion, which still lingers at ten o'clock—even red is in the sky as late as this: one evening at twenty minutes after ten o'clock I could see a glow; this is the latest hour I have seen sunlight in the sky in southern England.

Whether dark summer nights or brilliant moonlight ones are better for enjoyment out of doors is not easy to decide. A June night in the oak woods is great when the full moon is set in a deep blue, which is quite different from any day blue of the sky; when not a breath of wind stirs and the air fairly vibrates with night-jars. Long after midnight I stood in woods so lit, every leaf, it seemed, dead-still,

a scene of elfin beauty. But the utter hush of summer on her inky nights, only deepened and accented by the file-like call of the landrail, or now and then a short burst of song from the nightingale, is most healing; it blots out cares that made the day uneasy. These are times at which men should be out of doors far more. I cannot remember to have been out in vain at daybreak or during the hour that precedes it. A few minutes after two on a June morning, before there is a vestige of light, the first lark is up, its homelike song dispelling the mystery of the time. It is often a short outburst followed by more hush: then many larks begin waking and springing up all about in the fields, and the east is really glimmering, so that we can see quick rearrangements in the leaden clouds there, which now hover on a sky of the faintest blue. And the swift morning comes: every lark is up in a great joy; the freshness of the earth goes through us; and always there is the same feeling—that we have never known it quite so good, so fresh before. Men are born again and have the hearts of children on a June morning. Freshness is as much a property of morning as mystery of night; yet, just as with the very early things of the spring, this freshness is always a revelation.

The glamour of the earth is strong on sounding summer nights as well as still ones. The joy born of the sound of the winds and rains

must be one of the sensations of the original man. What can an ear for such sounds owe to culture? Ages before there was culture on the earth, men must have felt joy in the elements. Homer's μέγα κῦμα θαλάσσης appealed to men separated as far from the Greek as are we from the Stone Age. In the most romantic part of the wood I have found among heaps of stones some of the flaked flints that were shaped out by the Stone Age men. If the wood were then a forest—and we certainly cannot trace that it was ever planted—these rough-hewn men may have been moved by the music and colour and mystery within it quite as much as we are to-day, with all our talk about artistic temperament and so forth—perhaps more. Forest wild, they were touched as we are by the wind of summer in the wood: when it sounded among the lower branches as fine rain dropping through a still air on the earth, or murmured like a gathering of bees in the tree-top. The sense of mystery and awe about the most familiar scenes at lonely hours, when the darkness begins to creep over the landscape, is strong with us from childhood up: how much more may it not have steeped these rude hunters, our remote forbears. I believe, then, that this feeling for the sounds of the winds and trees and waters, and the still abounding sense of mystery, have come down from these unpolished men that lived the strong lives largely with Nature. The root struck too



## THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH 19

deep to be removed wholly by any culture of civilisation.

Most of an English summer is harvest of some sort in a district where hay, wheat, barley, and oats are the chief crops. Even on these long sunset evenings, standing in the lane we may smell the pungent hay, but there is a great deal to come before the main harvest, that of the corn, begins. The hot flowers of summer are only beginning when we feel that the days are shortening ; mulleins with yellow and pink-centred blossoms ; the graceful nettle-leaved bell-flower, that will rear its blossoms over the top of the tall hedge to have its share of the sun and air ; clustered bell-flower, the deepest violet of all ; bee-loved scabious, in lavender or Wedgwood shade of blue ; two species of St. John's wort, which look, if flowers ever did, thirsty for the heat of summer.

Not before August is the grass-grown lane scented with the traveller's-joy, last of the chief flower scents of summer : you despair of summer when this has turned to seed. Then the wheat crops, lying in the bottoms of the great downs and a little up the sides of some of these, are burning to that colour which is nearer to gold, when touched by the evening sun, than anything else in Nature in England. A month ago there passed out of the summer most of its bird song. One can count the times one heard the cuckoo after the first week in July. The swifts are on

the point of going. We know there are great scenes preparing—all the pageantry of autumn and winter; still anything that seems to put back even the minute hand of the year's clock is good. If life was long, and one was insured to enjoy many Junes to come, there would be so much less call to regret the going of summer. As it is, we pay special heed to birds and flowers that linger after their usual time. More flowers and birds do so than a casual watcher thinks. One season the night-jars were humming so late as August 5; a week later the beautiful silver-washed fritillary butterflies were still in their prime. Another season, the grasshopper warblers were reeling with power, several of them in the most tangled of coppices, on August 13. It was evening, and the quiet was deepening and deepening, and the mysterious blue-gray gloom was beginning to spread on the distant tree. This is a wonderful hour in August to be out at and above. The reel of the grasshopper warbler, listened to intently, is no monotony; it rises and falls just as the whirl of the night-jar does. There is a certain quality in the grasshopper warbler's notes attuned to the mood of the going summer. So also are the notes of two birds, heard far more than the grasshopper warbler in these harvesting days and evenings, the yellow-hammer and the ciril bunting. There is nothing about them of the abandon of spring or the passion of June. They do verge on the melancholy.

Their music now is of the thin order of the small grasshopper's : I am sure the cirl bunting's August voice is thinner and less full of passion than his voice earlier in the year. The yellow-hammer's sizzing distinctly reminds one of the grasshopper ; the stutter of the corn bunting is of much the same thin, insect-like order ; the greenfinches' perpetual " yshweeo " goes well with the others. They sing their slight songs, and challenge each other with no particular spirit, hour after hour through August days. A yellow-hammer, always perched high on an outer twig, sizzes ; a cirl bunting, hid in the hedge, bubbles its challenging reply ; another time, and it is a corn bunting against a greenfinch. The fire of summer is burning very low ; the single note of intensity comes from the grove, where the ring-doves still warm their eggs. The grasshopper warblers' coppice, full of delicate musk-mallow, pink and white, and prickly teasel and rose bay willow herb, lies by the road which winds up to a remote village seven hundred feet above the sea. But we have only to go into the lane to see and hear the other birds, or a few hundred yards up the bye-road opposite, to reach a field where there are thousands of real corn-cockles, simple, beautiful flowers, rose-purple. This is the road where the greater stitchwort so abounds that its veined snow-white blossoms after dark are as snow-flakes on the hedge banks : the stitchwort has long gone ; in its place, another of this starry family, the

## 22 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

chickweed, sleeps at dusk, the leaves approaching each other in pairs to shield the tender shoots.

These birds and flowers are details of the grand harvest scene which completes the summer. It is a mistaken notion that the English harvest has lost its old beauty and interest. Indeed, I do not see how it can ever lose either while there is corn burnt yellow and chocolate-brown to cut. True, the corn no longer goes down before the sweep of the whetted scythe: the swing and rhythm of the mowers, fine to see with their great arms browned to the colour of the wheat ears, is missed: nothing tested the ripe manhood more than this tremendous labour on garish August days. Into showy feats of strength, hammer-throwing or weight-lifting, the best virtue of physical manhood scarcely enters: it was the *endurance* of the mower that one admired, rather than the bulk, the iron of his muscle strength, though this was great enough. Mason idealised him in the "Harvest Moon," but, make no mistake, the mower in real life was often a grand figure. He has gone; in his stead are machine cutters with fierce teeth and knives, which may make a man tread warily after dark in barns or open fields where they lie. Many of these gather and bind as well as cut, and so the corn-fields are not quite the old scene of human labour. But when all is said that can in favour of the old style against the new, it remains that an English harvest in a corn-growing land

is a beautiful and inspiring scene. The machines are in themselves not beautiful, but in the field and moving they actually make up somewhat for the loss of the figures of the harvesters. They do their work so cleanly, there is always such interest and wonder in their dexterity. The sounds they make are not all displeasing; the sound indeed of machinery can be good to the ear. Who ever was vexed by the distant whir of the corn-thresher? To me it is a delight, with the rise and fall in its voice as of some living thing.

As the harvest approaches completion, once more as of old there is the motley of workers, both sexes and all ages, in the fields. There comes that most moving scene of any in our harvest, when the anxious farmer and his men are gathering and stacking the last load or two in the half darkness, at seven o'clock, it may be, or even later, on a September evening. There is not a trace of bright colour in sky or land. It is all monochrome; shade, with deeper shade, slow moving forms of men, and the wain. Then the harvest is done, and the fields wear the kempt look of farms in early autumn. Yellow stacks of corn, trimly thatched, with dark-brown stacks of beans or heavy perfumed clover, stand together at the edge of fields near the gates; the slasher is at work upon the roadside hedges. In broken line women and children in the stooping posture, whose pathos the genius of Millet



## 24 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

alone has set out on canvas, search the stubbles, leasing the small waste of corn that lies scattered about. Ruth is still amid the corn. No work of man is in such harmony with Nature as the bold, simple one in the wheat-field. In the main, harvest, after all, is to-day as it was thousands of years ago. Like the sower sowing broadcast, the wielder of the scythe, winning his bread, if ever man did, by the sweat of his brow, has given way to other methods: this race was not to be for ever to the strong. But these are changes in detail only: perhaps the gradual slipping into disuse of the harvest-home is more serious.



## CHAPTER II

### AT FALL

THE wrecking storms at the fall of the year are intensely fascinating. On some day comes one that brings down the shower of leaves that have not turned colour, but shrivelled and dried and darkened. They strike against the door and window, these crackling, scampering leaves of October, with such sharp sound and force as now and then to startle the watcher of the storm with the odd idea that they are some living, suffering things in mad flight. This wild rush and dance of leaf never loses, through familiarity, its power to affect us. Shelley gave words to the harmony in supreme lyric. The great humane imagination of Dickens turned it to cunning account. But the written picture of the scene is so pale against the scene itself. Some prefer the days of the early Autumn with their faint sunshine, when each leaf

## 26 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

falls through its own weight straight and noiseless to the ground. And charming such days are : storm and shine together are indeed of the woof and warp of autumn. But the north wind wailing, the south-west blustering, the wet storm lashing at the pane—these are full of glamour. To listen to the storm, or at night to peer through the window into it, sometimes suits the mood as much as to see it clearly by daylight out of doors. This is the revelry of Nature ; only at long intervals in England we see her orgies. After such an orgy, of which a very old peasant can at most call one or two to mind, the trees will wear a strained look. It is quite distinct from the wreckage, the smashed limbs, here and there the uprooted tree, the litter of snapped dead twigs. The strained look about trees is when the whole foliage for days to come will seem bruised, even the greenest leaves leaving the impression on one that they are about to shrivel and perish from the shock. Serene calm follows. We see the pleasant fields glittering fresh from the plough ; here, as with the sheets of rose sainfoin and yellow charlock, is splendid colour, when lately turned, rich as any.

The first colours of the autumn make little show compared with the beeches and oaks of November ; they offer no broad effects, being unmassed, but, looked into, they are seen to be often vivid and biting. Cornel tree or dog-wood turns early. But, to see the hidden beauty of

this cornel, we must get its leaves between ourselves and the sun, for its hue is sullen. The wayfaring tree is choicely named; its clusters of white flowers and its crimson berries cheer the wayfarer in summer and autumn, as later does the traveller's-joy, with white threads often glistening in the sun. But here again is a tree whose wrinkled dull-red leaves make little show. The spindle-wood is far less shy. I have seen its leaves as bright in September as its lovely fruit, orange in the coral case. The bramble has crimson and yellow on the same leaf, the colours running into each other, or else yellow as ground colour dabbled with blood-red. The wild strawberry's leaf is all crimson, a shade deeper than the bramble's, and so too the little trailing St. John's wort. Sometimes blossom and death or bud and death sit on the same twig; the flowers of the second crop of the honeysuckle are opening at the time when the leaves are turning pink and purple and yellow: in the coppice the full-grown leaf of the oak shoots is at the turn whilst the tender, crimson young leaf is unfolding. Some fresh beauty of tint and combination is ever being paid out; there is no exhausting these treasures. One day the wild cherry or gean tree in pink and purple seemed almost as fair as in its milk-white marriage dress of May. But what a delicate beauty is this wild cherry tree's in the spring! I know where it grows and blossoms in the secret wood. Thinking of it, I wander

## 28 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

in the wood a child again; trees are full of associations.

On the whole, it is not quite true to say of the maple of our great hedgerows that it "burns itself away": the flame, if so, would very often be of a pale yellow. One maple that I know casts all its leaves so that the ground beneath the tree is yellow for days. For biting fire colour we have the marsh, where the coarse grasses are all tipped with it, and many osiers from autumn till May. The ash tree in the woods may disappoint. You expect a pale lemon; but this tree will often go into mourning in October, and cast the dingiest of leaves, like the horse-chestnuts in a smoky town. Often one tree from unknown cause far surpasses others around. I cannot forget the sycamore at the foot of the hill: its yellow leaves were stained with coral of the shade of the spindle-wood drupes; behind, stood a sombre pine to set it off.

These are the first stages in the pageant of the fall. When the beech hanger reddens the pageant is at its height; after, comes oak week in November, and it is ended. I have seen the hanger almost as a sheet of fire. Another day and another atmosphere, beeches have flushed carmine. When I first saw this beautiful effect, I could hardly believe that the colour did not belong to the trees, so perfectly distinct it was. Now I know that any group of beech trees with brown and yellow leaves can appear carmine at a



few hundred yards distance, given the favouring state of atmosphere. This is one of the borrowed splendours of trees. We know that all things of colour depend on the light travelling to them on the mysterious wave journeys. So that in reality all the splendour is borrowed. But there is a distinction here. The red-rose of the large leaves of scarlet oak, the yellow and carmine of the sycamore, the sanguine hues of dog-wood and wayfaring tree, first the yellow then the brown of the bracken, are fast colours: they are *there*, we can go and look into them: the carmine of the beeches depends on the state of the air, and the distance—it is not really *there*: go a little nearer the trees, and you see that they are just brown or red-brown and yellow. The beeches have done by the time the oaks are at their prime. Here there is little of fire. The red of the oak is in May, not November. But for the masses of subdued colouring, for its browns and ochres, the oak wood is wonderful. It ends in a glory this six weeks of colour. There is nothing after the oaks, and little with them: only a few birches have kept to the end a sprinkle of brilliant yellow leaves on their top boughs; the lower were naked weeks since.

But it is only the colour of the foliage after all that has gone from the earth for a few months. As for the woods, no sooner are they leafless than they take on fresh colour. The Greek sang of the wine-coloured sea, and the

### 30 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

woods, too, where the birches grow, are wine-coloured in winter. Sometimes for hours a violet haze lies about the woods, whilst at sun-down there are monochromes of purple or gray, we cannot always say which. The sun leaves a coppery wash behind it: this soon fades out, and the swart trees are blotched on the horizon.

The creeping mists of the winter evening are surer beautifiers than the most dazzling sunlight. In the city, by the river-side, we see them turn the factory chimneys into spires wrapt in mystery. In such a mist I have stood and watched with wonder what in the sunshine and summer is a most flinty, unlovely workhouse set warningly on a hill over the little market-town: it might have been a palace, it was so fine in the thickening light. On a cold, still winter evening, as the sun is going down, the muddy puddles on the highway flash as with precious stones. But often midwinter mornings, clear and sharp, and nights which have none of this witchery of the atmosphere, none of these blooms and hazes, are most beautiful. Such a radiant morning breaks in December after a night of fog and frost mingled. In the woods the sun shines on larch and beech trees with every twig weighted by rime, many coloured and flashing as the star Sirius; for the frost catches the fog as it wreathes itself about the trees and congeals it there. Before midday the icicles, some being half an inch round, thicker than the twigs on

which they formed, fall in showers. A heavy bird, such as a wood-pigeon, perching on a slender branch, will bring down a miniature avalanche. Every tree in the wood is coated heavily, but those with fine twigs, as the beech and the birch, are the more effective: the weeping birch is most beautiful of all on such a morning; as after ordinary hoar frosts is the bracken fern with its delicate filigree. The hanger, all glistening in the sunlight, is a great scene after fog and frost. It is a steep hillside, ten acres or so of the beech trees which flourish on the chalk. It is best seen for large effects of colour at a point on the same ridge, half a mile away. In May you look on a great slope of emerald; in October of fire; and now, when hoar-frosts come, of sheen. Nights of hard frost at this time come after sunsets which give an impression of restraint in splendour. There is the coppery wash, and beneath, brooding on the earth's rim, the stilled rack of leaden cloud. It tells of the coming of another bitter night.

On such nights the way home through the woods is better by far than the way by the road. I have never quite outlived the vague feeling of awe which the deeps of the wood after dark filled me with in childhood. The sense is strong then of moving in a strange world, quite different from the land of every day, and in the midst of a solitude compared with which the solitude of the day, even on lonely moor or mountain, is

## 32 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

populous. This, too, like the feel of the June nights and mornings, is very healing. Starting while it is still dark, one often sees unfold themselves three distinct phases of wood beauty on a night when the frozen leaves crackle under foot, awaking and scaring the fearful wood-pigeon off its high perch. The first part of the walk is before the moon begins to show. The light in the sky seems to be given out by the stars and planets, some flashing an intense blue, others yellow or red. Even in this light the glittering of the frosted snow can be seen clearly in places; by-and-by, when the strong light comes, the snow will scintillate all around. Now mark the second phase. The moon is seen rising behind and amidst the oaks, whose dark trunks and gnarled branches stand out; this is the time to enjoy the infinite variety and the beauty of the naked limbs and lesser branches in trees etched on a colourless sky; above all it is the time to see oaks. When one looks from the trees to the moon rising amid them, as one moves, it flashes like the liveliest of the stars. The last phase and the longest is when the moon, risen clear of the trees, which she sets off and which set her off, rides high in a serene heaven, to put out the light of the stars as though she were a sun. Orion swinging west is seen no more; the Pleiads are dimmed. Then it is so light, what with snow and moon, that in open spots it would be possible to read large print.

The forms of trees, light and shade, the flowing of waters, the sound of winds, by these alone the earth might cast her spell upon us. We see and feel not more of her beauty than lives in these on such a winter night in the woods; yet the spell of it is strong. To one coming from the city, where often the night is soulless except by the river, the vague outline of the hedges along the highway, on a very dark winter evening, the faintest glimmerings of light on the horizon are full of allurements: driving or afoot—but better afoot, for there can be more sense of intimacy between Nature and the slow wayfarer—one peers into the dark, gradually discerning the form of tree and hill, and dividing the earth from the sky. To be born blind to the distinctions of the primary colours, even the finest gradations of them, must be grievous loss and hindrance to full joy of life. It is a loss scarcely less to be blind, through want of appreciation or attention, to the wonderful scenery of common fields and highways and hedges when colour has been inked out by a moonless, starless night. Shade and glimmering light and sheer blackness make the monochrome; the monochrome that is often the masterpiece. But I do not suggest that Nature could be to us what she is, if the scenes were only lifeless ones of autumn and winter. These are the solemn backgrounds. Life, the otto of God, must be in the front: it could not long be omitted without the



## 34 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

glamour growing less. May and June have their pre-eminence through abundance of life in breathing and growing things, and there is no form on the earth in which it is quite so exquisitely presented as in that of the small bird.



## CHAPTER III

### LITTLE BIRDS IN MINIATURE

A MINIATURE of a long-tailed titmouse, on first thought, might seem uncalled for, for here is a bird which, feathers apart, is not larger than a lady's thimble. Yet no English bird, not even the golden-crested wren, lends itself better than this mite to description in miniature. Indeed, unless you come very close to such atoms of life, and deal almost microscopically with them, you can scarcely hope to carry away any but a vague idea of their exquisite ways. Well I know that, to paint with words a titmouse or gold-crest miniature to the life, one would need to have a rare gift and to spend long time and labour on each study. All I can hope is to fortify the belief of some bird-lovers that the life of the tiniest

## 36 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

wild bird is worth watching in its finest detail; that the smaller the bird the more desirable the miniature. The reward of the watcher often is slow to come, but when it comes is rich. "Ruder heads stand amazed at those prodigious pieces of Nature—whales, elephants, dromedaries, and camels; these I confess are the colossal and majestic pieces of her hand; but in these narrow engines there is more curious mathematics; and the civility of these little citizens more neatly sets forth the wisdom of their Maker. Who admires not *Regio Montanus's* fly beyond his eagle?"

The long-tailed titmouse is to be watched in any month, and is easy to find by its incessant call "ze, ze, ze" throughout the year. One rarely walks or rides in the southern counties, where the bird abounds, without meeting with a pair or a party in the wayside hedgerows, the blackthorn and gorse commons, or the oak and ash coppices. In hard frosts the long-tailed titmouse can be approached very closely indeed where it swings and sways among the twigs of the hedgerow thorn. It is an acrobat, being a tit, but I think a little slower on the whole in its movements than the blue tit, the cole, or the marsh, distinctly not so pert as those species, having none of the effrontery in its mien of the ox-eye. In the highway I watched and followed three long-tails on a bitter day early in the year; this is the weather when by soft movements you can steal very close to any titmouse but the ox-eye, or to a golden-crested

wren ; when even the sly tree-creeper seems not to hasten to put a tree trunk between himself and his watcher. The hedgerow, formed almost wholly of hawthorns exposed on one side to the lash of winter rains that drive across the little valley, had been painted thick by the greenish, yellowish fungus or mould that so soils the hands and clothes if touched : this is a growth similar to that often seen on the hoary beard of the clematis in wet autumns. The titmice swung in and out among the twigs, pecking sharply at the stems covered by this noisome mould. Whether the mould itself is on their menu I hesitate to say ; but a close scrutiny reveals absolutely nothing to the eye in the form of insect food. All the while that they swing and flutter among the thorns they keep up their call-note. It is said that these little birds which flock alter their call-note when they come upon a patch of wood or ground particularly rich in food stores : that the ordinary note is uttered merely that the members of the party may keep in touch with each other as they pass on from hedge to hedge, from tree to tree, but that when one bird alights upon a good patch it makes the announcement to its fellows in a way instantly understood by them ; and forthwith they flit to the spot. I cannot say that I have detected such subtle difference in the call-note of the long-tailed titmouse ; but perhaps its cries increase a little in vigour and number when a good patch of food is found. At any

## 38 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

rate the "ze, ze, ze" goes on without fail. There is no risk of the titmice losing touch of one another in the light; and when the dark draws on they cluster tight together and pass the night in the form of a bunch of down. All the while they work along the hedgerows, they are puffing out one moment, to lay flat and smooth the next, their lovely little feathers, black and white and faint rose.

The spring is azure for me when the long-tailed titmice, paired off, have begun to build. Early wrens' nests are so very often a delusion. Such numbers, built by cock birds that have not secured a mate, come to nothing: though now and then it does happen that one of these early nests, finished to the very lining, and apparently deserted, will hold its first egg weeks later. But the long-tailed titmouse, once he begins a nest, will carry it through. Hard weather, the very hardest weather of March and April, may postpone work already begun: it never causes the long-tailed titmouse to abandon a nest of which the foundation has been made. Only when the birds find they have chosen an impracticable site, such as one that sways too much in a spruce fir, which would make fitter quarters for the golden wren, will they desert. By the middle of March the nest is often begun. A sure sign of a long-tailed tit's nest near is fuss and chatter. Even among a family famous for chatter, the long-tailed titmouse stands out as noisy at nest time. Now we have not alone the call-note, but the scarcely less



familiar one which human speech cannot utter : perhaps this is the "ptge" sound, which Seebohm truly said was not to be put on paper. Two pairs were building on March 15 last year, one in a fir in the shrubbery, three feet from the ground, the other in a small hawthorn at the edge of the wood. Both faced, as these wonderful nests always face, a sunny quarter. The nest in the fir was being glued to the drooping twigs above, below, at the sides: months afterwards, I took from the tree the wreck of it: it had to be torn out, so tightly was it still clinging. I have known of one or two cases of chaffinches' nests wrenched from their positions by the wind and flung to the ground; but these nests, despite the gluing and felting skill of their builders, are slightly attached compared with the long-tailed titmouse's. About a quarter of the nest in the white thorn, when first I saw it, had been built. It closely resembled a chaffinch's nest, in position, material, and shape. A bird-nesting boy with me said "chaffinch." But I felt sure it was a titmouse's, and lying flat down three yards away, among the brambles and dead leaves and bracken, I watched and waited.

Presently the tits arrived. One had its beak full of lichens. It chattered all the while, saw me, and flew a little way off. The other did likewise. I waited quite still, and presently was rewarded. One of the birds, the hen, I believe, flew into the bush and entered the nest. At first its movements within the nest seemed to me

## 40 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

delicate and timorous, as if much vigour would do harm to the structure. But upon the next visit of the bird I noticed a display of considerable vigour. The little creature rummaged about in the nest, tail (which was pushed upwards, of course), body, and head all going hard.

All the while the beak built up the sides, the body was moulding and pressing the inside of the nest. It was curious to notice the way in which the builder wormed her way round and round the nest, touching up now one side now another. Once, to my joy, I saw her drag a scrap of material off the edge of one side of the nest and place this elsewhere. As a result of this method of building, the sides grow up quite level. I was so near that I could see her tiny beak pushing and weaving and pressing the building materials together with an intense energy. Both birds built; though the cock could not quite muster the courage whilst I lay by the nest. The cock long-tailed titmouse does not merely attend the hen and encourage her as the cock linnet or the cock tree-creeper does. He works with a will himself. Is it because the nest is such a long and difficult undertaking that he shares the labours, or is the long and difficult nest the result of this energy on the part of both hen and cock? At the origin, did the energy make the nest or the nest the energy?

A minute inventory of the nest, so far as it had gone, showed that the following materials

were in use: moist moss; small tree-lichens, flattish, green-gray on the upper, and dark, boot-leather brown on the under side; silk from the cocoons of some insects, cobwebs, one feather (worked into the side: the great mass of feathers used for lining are not laid in till the nest has been roofed); tiny strips of thinnest birch bark; very fine dried grasses.

As these tits flew about their home they looked like scraps of wind-borne fluff. "Exquisite"—it is a feeble, ineffectual word by which to describe them. It made me tingle with joy in the watching.

Seeing the long-tailed titmouse at very close quarters, I am sure that it is the most perfect gem of a bird that flits in an English wood. I forget the claims to this distinction of my red-starts and lesser whitethroats, the former so choice in his colours and grace, the latter—the "new little bird" which climbed the old naturalist's crown imperials and sipped liquor out of their bells—so comely in build and nimble in action. But I falter in fealty to the titmouse whenever I get very near to the golden-crested wren. On the wing this bird is no match in beauty for a long-tailed titmouse caught and buffeted by the whiffing breezes of a gay spring day—to him half gales no doubt—as he goes to and fro between the lichened trees and his nest in the thorns. But watch a pair of golden wrens scattering tiny sprays of hoar-frost on a brilliant winter day as they hunt for minutest insects

among the spruces or larches! In the fir-tree walk I followed a party of six or seven golden wrens on a summer morning, parents with their children. I came so near that I might have insinuated my walking-stick into the low fir in which they were hunting, and touched a youngster when its back was turned to me. With a butterfly net on a fairly long handle I could, more than once, in woodland rambles, have taken golden wrens. A female blackcap, on the same tree with these twittering wrens, bulked quite clumsy and large. Each midget move from twig to twig—moves of perhaps not more than an inch or so—each stretching forth of the neck when the golden wrens were about to seize an insect, was prefaced by a certain tremor, a quick opening and shutting of the wings. The cause of these wing quivers which we see not only in golden wrens, but in much larger birds, such as thrushes and blackbirds and in shrikes, is not clear. It may be that they serve to keep the birds in constant readiness for the alert springs and flutterings which are so necessary. But in summer days perhaps the best performance of the golden wren's is when he leaves his twig of a sudden to take a fly in the air, or to remove one from the under side of a leaf, which he cannot reach except by quivering in the air under it for an instant or thereabouts. This is done with all imaginable ease: I doubt if ever he misses his aim, as finches, perhaps warblers,

certainly sparrows, will miss now and then when they take to hovering.<sup>1</sup> I have seen a golden wren hover a foot or so under the branch of a stript ash tree in autumn and there capture something: in such a case the prize is some tiny grub hanging down by a white silken line from the branch above. At other times silky cocoons on ruined cobwebs hold treasures which must be hovered for. Robins will hover freely under walls, picking insects out of cobwebs.

An incident, which I related in "The Birds in our Wood," of how a lizard one day in the spring of 1902 climbed up my arm and sat on my shoulder, evidently intending to use this perch for fly-taking purposes, led on to the question, has any man in England ever been perched upon by an adult wild bird? Mr. Arthur Severn has told me of a squirrel that found its way into his house, climbed to his knee, and discovered and raided the nut stores: I know of a case of a lady near Derby on whose lap the wood squirrel will sit and eat a hazel nut. But these are tamed wild things, like the robins and thrushes which come indoors, and

<sup>1</sup> I do not know whether nightingales are ever seen actually to hover: I have seen them take insects in the air, flying at these out of the hedge of a lane. I have seen a nuthatch hover to take an insect close to the wall of an old building. The wood wren hovers under a leaf to take an insect as the golden wren does. I have seen a missel-thrush hover under a branch as the wood wren does; a wren take a fly in the air, darting up from the ground for it, and a cuckoo take a Mayfly in the air.



will even follow their human friends upstairs. I wanted to know of a case, if there was one, of an untamed full-grown bird perching on a man. An Oxford lady has given me a charming instance of the kind. The incident was told to her by Mr. Cordeaux, of Great Cotes, in Lincolnshire. One morning the gardener came in to report the arrival of the golden wrens—for our native golden wrens are swelled largely in numbers by Continental visitors.

“It was stormy and wet, but Mr. Cordeaux at once went out to watch them pass. There was a flight of the little birds, and they seemed very tired, settling on the hedges. A few settled on Mr. Cordeaux’s umbrella and shoulder. After a few minutes one of them rose with a little cry, making a circular flight, then another and another, and so the whole flock went on its way west. My friend did not tell me whether Mr. Cordeaux thought they were all grown-up birds or not, but you would know if there is ever a flight of young birds only.”

These golden wrens were, of course, all adult birds. The noble observer of migration, Gätke, describes the amazing golden wren migration as seen in Heligoland in the autumn of 1882. On the 28th of September the number that appeared was too vast to be calculated even roughly. Under the glare of the lighthouse lantern the birds looked like snowflakes driven by the wind. So I have seen a high-flying flock of wood-pigeons

snow-white against the leaden rack of hail-cloud, a beautiful, transient result of bright light from the sky at my back. During that 1882 migration the Upper Plateau of Heligoland was peopled by these wrens. Many were seen sitting on the window bars of the lighthouse, engaged at their toilette by the artificial light. The circles which Mr. Cordeaux's golden wrens described are common to other golden wrens on starting again on their journey after a rest. During their spring migrations Gätke saw the earliest of the sleeping wrens awake, with the sky still aglow from the sunset, rise from the bushes, uttering its call-note, "hiit, hiit, hiit"—a "clear, fine note," Gätke said: I would rather describe it as needle sharp—and fly off in "slightly ascending spirals."

This note awakened the sleepers. They rose with their answering cry. When all were awing, the summoner ceased his circles. With beak erect and short quick strokes, he sped up into the night deeps. The call-notes died out: the travellers vanished. Gätke breaks into lyric over this scene. Indeed, who can think much about these urgent travels of the frailest of birds, high through trackless space, and in the dark, and not be moved by the wonder, the utter mystery of it?

Why are the larger English birds on the whole so much shyer and harder to approach

## 46 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

than such animated mites as the long-tailed titmouse and the golden wren? One theory is that the larger fowl have been more persecuted in the past than the small, as indeed they commonly are to-day. It seems reasonable, but one is rather shaken by exceptions to the general rule that the smaller birds are the least fearful of man. When you do go too near to golden wren and titmouse for the comfort of these birds, they will merely remove themselves a little distance, and then feed on without taking further heed of you. Larger birds do not forget your intrusion so easily as titmouse or golden wren: they will watch you warily after they have flown off. But a very small bird, the tree-creeper, is distinctly shy of man; it may nest in a cleft in the bark of a tree close to the house—year after year a tree-creeper has nested in the cleft ash tree on the lawn, which was split asunder by lightning when I was a child—but it runs round to the far side of the branch when it sees you near at hand: there is no reason to suppose it has ever been a persecuted bird. Nightingales and blackcaps are shy and wary in the deep wood, where they are seldom disturbed; though they are less fearful of man in some places in England where they nest near a highway and are constantly seeing and hearing human passers-by. The common wren was cruelly persecuted in England and in Ireland for centuries, yet it is very patient of man's presence. On the

other hand the goldfinches, when flocked in the autumn and winter, are wary beyond most small birds; and it is true that they have been pursued by generations of bird-catchers. But we must make allowance for flocked birds, for there is no doubt that they are always more wary than isolated birds, and for a simple reason. Some member of a flock is sure to catch sight of an intruder, and to take alarm before its companions. It is up and off, and then the danger signal unconsciously given by it flashes through the flock. Is there any analogy between birds and insects in this matter? To take butterflies: the purple emperor, one of the largest butterflies in England, is very wary indeed, but he cannot have been much chased. The clouded yellow, a smaller butterfly, is harder to take than most English butterflies, being swift of wing as well as wary. The very small Duke of Burgundy fritillary is wary, much more so than the common blue. Power of wing and wariness seem on the whole to go together among English butterflies and moths, the latter almost implying the former. The humming-bird hawk moth, though I have stroked it on the wing as it hovered over the fuchsias in the Isle of Wight, is one of the shyest and swiftest of all.

Weeks after the young long-tailed titmice and the golden wrens had left their nests, and gone out with their parents into a wonderful wood world, I was down by the glittering water under

## 48 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

the ferny holt of campion and blue hyacinth. Here, nearing the main, deepening now, anon spreading, it flows a full-fed river: its large meadows rich in life of flower and insect and bird. By a runlet, in the thick ivy of the garden wall, a pair of gray wagtails had their nest last year. It was one of the only two nests of this bird I ever knew of in the county: the other was strangely placed under the slate roof of the house in the midst of the great wood, far from water and gray wagtail haunt. Yet now and then, out of the nesting season, I have seen pairs or solitary birds about the water, so perhaps a few nest there each season. The much commoner summer or yellow wagtail I have never seen in the district that seems so well suited to it. The cock gray wagtail is thought by some people to be the most beautiful and graceful of the smaller British birds. In beauty of colouring, in form, and in graceful carriage combined, he is perhaps the finest, though for plumage alone I set the cock redstart first. The redstart, too, has the better of the gray wagtail in song; the latter has a little song, but not so good as the redstart's. Bright sulphur yellow and blue-gray are the wagtail's chief colours. His elegance is captivating. He has a longer tail than the pied or the yellow wagtails, and is a little larger than either.

The nest in the ivy contains three young wagtails, which, when I saw them, had been out



of their shells about a week or ten days. The male bird of this species takes his part, it is said, in warming the eggs. This statement I cannot bear witness to, but I have noticed that he is one of the exemplary husbands in birdland. He is always near by when nest building, egg hatching, and rearing the young are in progress. Watching for a time one morning, I was happy to witness a most charming incident in gray wagtail life. The morning being fine, the hen bird came from the garden rails, a favourite spot of hers and her mate's, and perched on a board which is laid across a little ditch as a footway. She doubled up her legs and sat down on this wood, which, as I found afterwards, had been warmed by the sun. Here she was fed by her husband.

He foraged on the lawn at the brink of the river, sometimes taking flies, &c., by running after and catching them on foot; at other times he made little excursions in the air, a few yards over the river, or over the lawn or meadow. His method of taking flies was quite different from the methods of any other insect-feeding species which takes flies on the wing. As regards taking flies just off the ground by running after them, the stone curlew, I believe, will take moths at dusk in somewhat the same way; but in the air this gray wagtail would secure as many as four or six insects during one short excursion of a few yards. Thus he would dart

## 50 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

up and seize an insect he had seen from the ground, turn perhaps at a right angle and seize another, turn sharply again and have a third, and so on. I never saw a spotted flycatcher act so, and the style was entirely distinct from that of swallows, swifts, or martins. But there is distinction in most of the movements of this little bird. He is an exquisite. His dress and deportment could not be smarter; in dress the ordinary water wagtail is plebeian beside him. And withal so domestic, such an irreproachable family bird.

After most of these short aerial insect hunts, in which he conveyed a kind of great butterfly impression to the watcher, he returned with a beakful of choice fare for his love. She behaved, the instant she saw him coming, just like a baby bird; cheeped eagerly, fluttered her wings, and opened her mouth. He advanced, and their beaks touched. Once I noticed that in the process a bit of food fell on the ground, either through his clumsiness or hers, one could not say which; whereupon he promptly picked it up and pushed it into her mouth.

Her conduct might have suggested that she was an interesting invalid. No doubt she may have been feeling slightly the fatiguing effects of her domestic labours. She looked a little dingy, as hen birds do after a part or the whole of their nesting activities; and her way of sitting down and sunning herself seemed to

tell of a certain tiredness. I never saw her make the least attempt to catch a fly herself while her mate was dancing in attendance. On another lawn I saw a delicate attention of the same character paid by a male pied or water wagtail to his mate. It would not be surprising to find that the custom is common to each of the five British species of wagtail—the gray, the white, the yellow, the pied, and the scarce gray-headed.

In the case of the pied wagtails I saw the hen join her mate on the tennis lawn. He ran and flew about, catching flies, and bringing them to her, three or four at a time. She made scarcely the least attempt to forage for herself. When he approached with a beakful, calling out to her with spirit, she behaved precisely as the hen gray wagtail had done; fluttered her wings, and uttered a number of baby-cries; she opened her beak, and he gave her the food. Then off he sped for another collection.

For a time she stood on the grass, and was fed there; presently she flew up into the horse-chestnut tree. Though she had changed her position while he was fly-hunting, he found out her new resting-place instantly; for no sooner did he return with food than she would clamour intensely. This went on for about half an hour, and then the birds were lost to view.

The male wagtails feed the females thoroughly and systematically. With other birds the attention may often be desultory. The rook feeds

## 52 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

the hen on the ground preliminary to courtship, I do not doubt, though I have not seen the birds meet one another thus after the young are hatched: feeding the hen as she sits on the eggs is a common custom among birds; it must help in the work of incubation. There may be cases—I see no reason why there should not—in which the cock bird during a long sitting is refreshed by the hen with food. These acts do not strike one in the light of delicate attentions or gallantry on the part of the male; rather they are business-like, if the eggs are to be hatched safely and with all despatch. The tree-creeper's habit of feeding his hen while she builds the nest reminds one much more of the wagtail habit after the young have been hatched, save that he is somewhat casual and uncertain: intent on his own repast, he can spare little thought for her: she would have to make a very small gift of insects go a long way, if she were not to refresh herself during the making of her nest: but she does refresh herself, for I have seen the little thing drop to the ground of a sudden in the midst of one of her jaunty, dipping flights for building material, peck up some atom of food—just one peck only—and then on to the bit of ground under the lime, and back to the cleft in the ash tree, the whole forming one incident. That courtship with some birds continues after the wedding I do not doubt, with these experiences of wagtail and tree-creeper. Whether it is ever

continued for months after the nesting season is another matter. But, delicate attention or not, I feel sure that bird-marriages on the whole are much more lasting than is commonly imagined. Certain species that are believed to marry for life, as carrion crow and raven, are often cited as though they were exceptional cases. It may well be they illustrate a rule, not an exception. Otherwise, how is it that almost any winter day we see various familiar English birds keeping company strictly in pairs? Take the bullfinches. They love to roam the great unshorn hedgerows at the edge of woods and along the winding lanes: in such spots we see small parties of bullfinches, cocks and hens mixed together, each probably a family party of the year; but not less often we see bullfinches in well-defined pairs, with their anxious "eep, eep" to one another, keeping close together. It is the same with many blue titmice, tree-creepers, nuthatches, hedge sparrows, and other birds. These, no doubt, are in most cases birds which reared a nest or two of young in the previous spring. It proves nothing that, when by some mishap the male is killed during incubation, the widow often promptly takes another mate. At this time she is translated by the passion of *στοργή*, the intense, master-love for the young. No one can speak with authority on the origin of this passion. We see it fire the object which it possesses, turning, as by magic, fear into courage, as in the extraordinary case



## 54 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

of the doe rabbit and the baffled stoat. It is not to be expected that the hen bird at this period should be inconsolable at the loss of her mate: in the ecstasy of the mother the wife is forgot. A new suitor, coming on the scene, may be accepted at once, especially if the bird belong to one of those species where the males always take an important part in hatching the eggs or rearing the young, indirectly by waiting on the hen, or directly by sitting on the nest or feeding the nestlings. The females of species in which the males are not bound by domestic duties need neither mourn for a lost mate nor desire a new.

I have seen nothing quite so complete in this way as the wagtails feeding their hens, but I like the important way in which the linnet attends his hen, whilst she is making the nest. Though he sometimes sits on the eggs to my knowledge, I have not seen him collect any building materials or help to weave the nest. But he must be by her, in his characteristic upstanding attitude, nearly the whole time she is choosing a site, and finding and arranging the moss and lining. When she flies off the nest, after working into it a beakful of material, she will utter a note or two: whereat, he will leave his perch on a high twig near by, cry out in answer, and fly off with her. I watched a pair of linnets building their second or third nest late in the summer, in the evergreen hedge. The hen carpeted her house with fluff from the under jacket of a

rough-haired collie, soft as eider down, and much liked by house sparrows, both sexes of which build. This fluff lay about the lawn. Each time she came to the grass to look for fluff, the cock bird attended. While she collected, he hopped about at a yard's distance or so, and hunted for food for himself. None of this food was offered to the hen, but in other ways nothing could be more chivalrous and thoughtful than his conduct. No other bird must come near while she collects. When a greenfinch, a bulkier bird than a cock linnet, came innocently down, he instantly gave battle, and fiercely drove it off. When she was up and off with her beakful, he knew it so soon as she had sprung from the ground, though he was looking another way, and was up too and away with her: there was always the call, necessary or not, always the joyous answer. No idyll was ever more charming than the loves of the linnets.

The red linnet, the name by which the country folk distinguish it from the greenfinch or green linnet, has become in many places the most abundant of all our smaller birds, after the house sparrow and the skylark. In every hedgerow, on the gorse commons, in the gardens, she builds her nest, one of the shapeliest and most finished of all birds' nests in its lining: and several broods are reared by a pair in the season. No wonder that assemblages of linnets begin to form before the summer is over, and by autumn have grown into great flocks. Up the lane and at the edge

## 56 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

of the cornfield there is an old chalk pit, overgrown with maples, hawthorns, and elders, over which trails in great festoons the traveller's joy, whose scent is brought out by the August rains. Scabious, of Wedgwood blue, knautia, and knap-weeds great and small, with the clustered bell-flowers, some deepest violet, others far paler, grow in the rank grasses. The place is often alive with linnets. Some are singing in August, others excitedly twittering for, as it seems, no particular object. This is a common incident in linnet life. Far more curious, and rarer to me, is the linnet great chorus of late summer or early autumn. Suddenly the whole body of linnets clustered in the hedgerows breaks, as by some uncontrollable impulse, into flood of song. Once only I have been present at this strange, fascinating performance, when for a minute or so there must have been scores of birds singing. But, ten miles away, a friend of mine, at the end of September 1901, was on the downs when there burst forth, from a hedgerow filled with the birds, a linnet song-storm. To this skilled listener and watcher there seemed to be some thousands of linnets singing at the same time and without a lull! He had never heard anything like it before. The multitudinous click of the swarming starlings in the trees on autumn evenings ere they sink to sleep, the uproar of the rooks at the roosting hour; these are as evening hymns, called forth by some emotion, the springs of

which we will never perhaps be able to discover. Are they Nature's unconscious opiates, sleep-bringers, as, with the race of men, some poppy or mandragora? The fancy may seem far-fetched, considering the ease and certainty with which all animals, save one, fall to sleep when their day is spent. Still, between the concerts of starling and rook and the time of darkness and of sleep there is clearly relation. These linnet concerts, on the other hand, in the two instances I have given, took place in broad daylight. Nor do I see how either courtship or rivalry could have been the incentive: there could no more be courtship than rivalry on this scale among a thousand linnets, many if not the bulk of them young birds of the season, late in September. There is in truth no explanation for such song-storms: nothing in the habits of the linnet give me the slightest clue. Evolution helps no more than natural theology. These things are of the unknown world of the bird.



## CHAPTER IV

### STRAY FEATHERS

IN March we watched the long-tailed titmouse building. Next came the golden wren in April. The wagtails, gray and pied, were of late May and the full summer: the linnets gathered in September. But it is hard, in a talk of birds, to follow faithfully the course of the seasons. The linnet chorus follows naturally the linnet nest. But I must turn back to swift, swallow, and starling, and with these for a while to the best of the late summer days.

The swift surely is never more wonderful than in the way it dashes to roost. Twice in August, the time when we expect the swifts to leave England, I had the good fortune to see several



of the birds retire for the night. The hour both evenings was a little after eight, and sitting by the window to watch the swift parties and gambols, I saw two or three birds dash down into the garden, over the roof, and vanish under the eaves. I knew that under the wooden edges of the house roofs on either side of the garden, swifts, sparrows, and starlings found nesting sites. Latterly, the swifts were ousted by the starlings, but whether the former nested or not they roosted there last year. The pace at which these swifts vanished was so great that, with the light beginning to fail, I questioned whether after all I had not been deceived; whether, instead of going under the roof and staying there, the swifts had not shot up again out of the garden and dipped into space beyond. But doubt ended when another swift, flying at the same great pace, struck the wall, causing a loud sound, as he went under the eaves. Probably it was the expanded wings that hit the wall, with a fan-like noise, not the body or head; so that no damage would be done to the flier by the impact. But what a pace to get into bed at—quite thirty miles an hour! Many birds hop gingerly, indecisively, to their roosting-place; the swift goes there with the flight of an arrow from the tight-strung bow. Once under these eaves, motion must be in an instant arrested, otherwise the bird will stun, if not kill itself. But how is this headlong speed, of a sudden, in a fraction of a second, arrested? What marvellous

## 60 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

brake is the swift furnished with? Think of the accurate aim of a bird suddenly swooping down at this pace and darting under a narrow ledge, at worst brushing his wings against the wall, at best touching nothing till he has found his feet, and, finding them, is settled for the night.

Though sometimes the swift has unfledged young so late in the summer that she has to leave them to starve in her nest, the instinct of migration overcoming even the passion of *στοργή*, I do not think these roosting swifts were going to their nests and young. It is very unlikely that, under the eaves of a single house, there would be three or more nests of swifts with eggs or young so late as August. Swifts, though so helpless on flat surfaces, even unable to rise from the ground by their own efforts, must perch somewhere for the night, and scramble into the air at light. Yet some have an idea that the male swifts sleep in the heavens. They think the stir, which we see among the swifts high over the village, at evening, means that the male swifts are chasing the females back into the nests; and that after all are driven in, the males gather together and, in a body, mount higher and higher into the heavens, where they spend the night. There is a delicate flavour about some of these village bird stories: I cannot see that they are more hurtful than the fairies and goblins of enchanted childhood. Why arise against them always the bludgeon of hard

fact? Swallow and martin, as well as swift, figure in some of these delightful superstitions. Even Yarrell and Macgillivray believed in the story of the martin's revenge on the inquiline sparrow—plastering it up completely in the nest—and I have found that the pretty idea of the martins before their departure south storing quantities of insect food under their feathers still exists: when the martins lingered on the south coast, an autumn or two ago, fisher folk were heard to say that the birds would not start because the wind blowing from the north would disturb their feathers, and so their food stores would be all lost.

These evening gatherings of the swifts, when the sun is going down and the air serene, are strange. I do not think they are always connected with the courtship of the swift, for they take place till the time the birds leave England: nor can they be preliminary to migration: they look as if they related to migration when they take place on August evenings, just before the birds start, but then we see them on June evenings too. I have counted some twenty swifts taking part in one of these performances. The birds flew low, sweeping and circling round their quarters, with shrill scream. At other times you see lesser parties of half a dozen birds acting in the same way, though perhaps at a greater height. It looks at first sight like the chase of one of the swifts by several others, but watching a little longer I never can make up my mind that any

## 62 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

particular bird is chased: now one bird now another seems to be playing the hare. But I believe that it is the effervescence of life that such bird performances often mean: not food, or sexual excitement, or migratory impulse, but sheer joy in life, animal spirit brimming over. The scream of the swifts in the June evening, the pæan of the lark, as I have heard it ring out of a leaden October sky—if this is not the sign of rapture, then we cheat ourselves in believing that birds rejoice in life.

Swifts, when hawking eagerly for food over the river, will strike against the angler's rod and almost brush his person. But in their frolics in mid-air I have never seen the least collision, though they will dart in and out among each other at closest quarters, spinning fine networks of flight. In this, the evening gambols of the swifts may remind one of the strange up and down, from side to side, dance of the gnats on a summer evening. So far as our eyes can follow them, two gnats never strike each other in these dances any more than do two swifts. One instant the whole densely packed party of gnats, many thousands in number, will be closing up into a yet more compact body: the movement completed, it opens out on both sides, to cover a space of two yards or so: constantly it rises straight up, then sinks a yard: often the gnats above will drop clean down through the gnats below, and then perhaps the closing up

movement takes place again. The gnats' dance will be kept up for an hour or two on a sunny evening in July or August. A little like the gnats' dance is the Mayflies' dance in June, but for complication and for perfect drill I know of nothing of the kind to match it except the starling evolutions on the autumn evening.

I have come to care greatly for the song of the swallow, which formerly I scarcely thought of as a singer. He sings through the heats of summer, when most birds have grown silent, and even the wren's ditties are rare. "Short swallow flights of song" is choice metaphor, gossamer-light, in "In Memoriam," but I doubt whether it is justified by the bird's habits. There are singers one need by no means look upon to enjoy to the full, but the swallow is not of these. One should see him singing, and it is hard to be too near. I have watched and listened to three cock birds perched on the chimney, no sign of bitter rivalry between them. Crouched low on their perch, they opened wide their mouths and poured out a profusion of notes, which one could not write down, could only describe as low and very sweet. With chestnut on their throats, metallic-blue on their heads and bodies, bottle-green about their tails, and all so satiny in gloss, the swallows are dainty birds to see.

A neighbour has his swallows indoors. He took me upstairs to see the nests. The window on the landing had been kept open all weathers,



## 64 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

throughout the summer. A pair of swallows came in one day, and glued their nest over the ledge of a bedroom door. Here they reared their young. Later they tried a second nest between a picture and the wall, which was a failure. However, they began and completed a third nest over the ledge of another bedroom door, and brought off a second brood of young. Every evening, about dusk, the young swallows and their parents came indoors and went to roost in a neat row on the narrow ledge over the door where the first nest was placed. They were not in the least disturbed by the people who share the upper part of the house with them; the opening and shutting of the bedroom doors did not drive them out of the window.

In August I have watched the swallows feeding their young on the wing. Young and old wheel about in small companies at a favourable spot where there happens to be plenty of fly food. The old bird, having collected several insects, calls to the young; the two meet, recognise each other among the throng; the young bird either drops beneath its dam or the dam mounts above the young; and then food is thrust downwards—as I have seen it, always downwards—into the beak of the latter.

During the two or three seconds this takes to accomplish, both birds hang in the same spot in the air by the quiver of their wings. It is clearly to both the easiest of feats: I have noticed

no failure. Once, however, I saw a young and an old bird fly towards one another, and no food passed. Apparently they recognised that they were not parent and child, and flew on.

Swallows are not the only English birds which can feed their young on the wing. Mr. Clear, of Shepreth, near Royston, gave me an account of a scene with a hedge-sparrow and a cuckoo. Walking between Melbourn and Meldreth, he saw a young cuckoo sitting on a path on one side of which were some tall oats. He approached the bird in hopes of capturing it. As he did so a female hedge-sparrow hopped out of the oats, twitting with concern, sprang up to the mouth of the cuckoo, and fed it: continuing to twit, she drew her foster-child away into the corn.

The same pair of martins returning year after year to rear their young in the same nest under the eaves—we often hear this said or see it written, but is it actually the same *pair*? I stated my view that marriages made in the bird world are more lasting than is often supposed, though cases of faithlessness may occur with both sexes. But I was thinking of resident birds, bullfinches, titmice, and others. Can it be that the martins or swallows illustrate often, even ever, this faithfulness of wedded bird life? It may be that paired birds do not always so sink their individuality in the flock at the end of the breeding season as to lose touch of one another completely: movements, for instance,

## 66 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

among flocks of jackdaws at midwinter point another way. I have watched a party of eight daws circling about the house. Again and again the eight, coming close together in their flight, have mingled in a body of which no two members seem specially related to each other. But, the circles and spiral movements continuing, suddenly the eight have split into four distinct pairs: these pairs have kept together, separating only to seek each other's company again after a little space, massing in the flock, only presently to leave the flock and soar and sweep through the air once more in couples. I could not doubt that the birds flying in pairs were wedded pairs, though there was no distinguishing the sexes at such a distance.

Resident birds, then, may in some cases, even when flocked, keep up the state of pair-ship after the season of nests and young birds has passed, perhaps for years, and until death comes between the partners. But what of the birds that travel in flocks over water and land, and at dark? Do they set out on their travels still paired? Can even a few of each thousand keep in pairs during the voyage and after their arrival in Africa, to return in the spring to the same spot and nest in the English coppice or hedgerow, or under the very eaves they chose a year before? If this is so, and can one day be proved, a new and singularly beautiful light will be shed on bird migration, and praise be added to praise;

no love on earth will rank truer than that of the birds. There is the possibility that birds paired one season in England may lose sight of each other in their travels, to meet and nest again together next spring in last year's haunts and trysting-places. In the case indeed of those birds, such as the nightingale, that return to England by sexes, first the male then the female, it must be this arrangement or none. But the question remains open. It might be answered by a long series of careful experiments, paired birds being taken, marked, and released; then, next year, pairs nesting in the same sites or very near might be caught and examined. The experiment would be easier in the case of house martins, swallows, and sand martins than of most other birds of passage that nest with us. Jenner caught swallows in their nests and attached a thin bit of wire to their legs: next season he found some of these marked birds back in the same nests. But he seems not to have troubled about the question of pairs. It is delightful to know that birds return to their old haunts, some using the old nest: but if it ever should be proved that the same wedded pair come back after months—which answer to years among men and women—to the old haunt, or meet there after long separation, a fresh and tender significance could be given to the ancient tradition that it is the finger of God which points out to the birds their way.

## 68 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

I have spoken of the extraordinary linnet concerts which are now and then heard in September. It is at about this time and also a little earlier that the swallow parties and concerts take place in my garden, the birds young and old sitting in rows and clustering in some bare twigs and small branches high in the great beech tree. These are lesser assemblages than those of the linnets, but gay and pleasant to watch. After some minutes of song and chattering, the party breaks up, all its members hastening away to hunt for food. The swallows gathering for their travels are more rarely seen inland. Mr. Whitton sent to me from Langdon Hills in Essex an account of one of these gatherings, which he saw on September 14, 1902. A very wonderful sight he called it.

"It was about six o'clock yesterday evening when we heard a long chirping which came from a tall tree about a hundred yards from this house. About five or six hundred swallows appeared to be hovering round the tree, when suddenly another flock joined them from the south-east. Thereupon they flew to another tree (a big elm), where they waited for a few stragglers. From here they went to a third tree, by this time numbering, I should think, some 2000 in all.

"Now began the remarkable part of the performance. Suddenly the whole flock rose and began a slow zigzag flight from north to south and south to north, gradually, very gradually,



flying westward. All the while they kept up a deafening chirp. To see each bird of the flock turning with the precision of a well-trained body of troops was wonderful. Gradually the whole sky was alive with detached bodies of swallows, making their way to the main body.

“Some detachments seemed to consist of one hundred or two hundred birds, some of only twenty-five or so; with an apparent leader. From all quarters, except one—the west—they came, east and south and north, and when they reached the main body, joined in the zigzag flight. We watched them for half an hour or more, at the end of which time the numbers were such as quite to darken the sky. Continuing their westward flight, they slowly disappeared from view.”

Deafening is not too strong a figure for such bird sounds. The clamour of these bird-clouds on migration, when for some reason they seek the lower air, was heard by Gätke: and once at Corfu, Lilford was startled by a noise as if all the birds of “the great Acherusian marsh had met in conflict overhead.” But it is by no means on their travels only that these uproars of the massed birds break forth. We have noticed the case of the linnets’ storm-song, which has nothing to do with travel. Then there are the autumn starlings. One of the greatest starling gatherings I ever saw was at the White Horse Hill on an October evening. We took shelter under the hedge of

gnarled thorns and wild-apple trees, and saw the storm lash the hoary side of this noble hill ; and, when the air cleared, the starlings, numbering thousands, cut their aerial figures over and around it, a sight neither of us will forget. But far larger flocks of starlings than this are sometimes seen. Tongues farm, near Capheaton, in the summer of 1902 was visited by a mighty host of starlings. They chose the plantation Mount Hully for their night quarters, and when all were gathered they covered between ten and twenty acres of ground. At a mile's distance in the air they looked like a thunder-cloud. Mr. Wales of Tongues farm told me that the shepherd saw one evening a hawk come out of the wood and make a dart towards the great flock. They circled in the air and "swept down with a tremendous dash at the hawk," which with difficulty escaped with its life. The noise these birds made, as they settled down for the night, was like the rattling of many chains or the machinery of a great factory in full work. The hawk was not the only bird discomfited by these starlings. At night the owls in the plantation yelled desperately.

This was a late summer flock, no doubt composed wholly of young or unpaired birds. I have seen small flocks of unpaired starlings even in May. Happily, not all our starlings flock. The season through, in all weathers, though they love best the sunshine days, I have my starlings to rejoice in. They are the best of our homely

birds, in song, in dress, in customs. Rarely a bright morning comes in autumn or winter but we wake to hear the starling's sing-song in the old apple tree on the lawn. The "shu-u-u-r, shu-u-u-r" of these contemplative birds, the long, drawled-out "que-e-e-er, que-e-e-er"—these never weary: there have been hours, evil hours in which "the nerves prick and tingle," when one had rather that the greenfinch and the high-perched yellow hammer were silent: but the wild starling is never too much. How fine his plumage glances with many colours in the spring and summer days! It is a tender and wistful poem of Kingsley's on the starlings; how in March<sup>1</sup> they had their plaint about the dreary time it was for building,

"Sad, sad to think that the year is but begun."

Whilst late in the autumn, among golden reed-beds, they were singing

"Ah, that sweet March month, when we and our mates were courting merrily;

Sad, sad to think that the year is all but done."

But this is more the way with those who sleep beneath the roof than with those that sleep beneath the eaves. There is no vain regret in the starling's voice. Even on wet October mornings we look out of the window to see him in the apple tree, draggled and drenched,

<sup>1</sup> Rather early for the starlings to be building, though one year mine were beginning by mid March.

and yet not miserable. In the mornings of all but the stormiest days he sets an hour apart for song. I have come to care for the starling as I do for the ousel and the throstle. He is so trustful and so companionable.

Among birds, it happens not rarely, I imagine, that the support and the final stages in the work of rearing the young are done entirely by the father. It is so on occasions with the starling certainly. Thus, a brood of young starlings having flown at the end of one week last summer, the father remained behind to look after a single chick, the backward one of the family, which did not leave its quarters under the roof till Monday.

For three days the father fed and tended the backward youngster. On Sunday the young bird seemed ready for flight. He peered over the ledge under the roof, took stock of things without his nursery, and once or twice pecked at a fly within reach. The most complete understanding existed between father and child. The young starling would see his father in the air approaching with food, and greet him eagerly and hungrily. It was clear to me he distinguished his father from other parent starlings with nests under the eaves, which were also feeding their young through the day. He knew quite well the way his father would come, and, incessantly peering out and round the corner, his glances were always towards the meadow which

furnished the food. He looked from time to time down to the ground just as a human being would who was calculating the height and the safety or danger of a descent which would presently have to be adventured.

Once, after feeding the young bird hard for an hour or so, the father perched in the beech tree and uttered a note which, I felt sure, was simply a call or suggestion that the child should come forth. It was not responded to, however, that day. The young starling did not leave the eaves till next morning, when I was absent.

But quite the most interesting thing I noticed in this starling study was a warning from father to child, which was acted upon. I moved my seat, and in doing so made the father uneasy. Sitting on the roof with a beak full of food, he uttered several quick, short notes, and the child instantly turned round, hurried back from the ledge out of sight, and kept silent in the dark for a while. Here, then, was one of the true alarm notes which birds utter on their children's behalf. It is to be distinguished from the mere not very purposeful scolding note, or the agitated note of an old bird whose nest is being approached or touched. Yet this alarm note serves other purposes. I have heard starlings utter it when they have had no young to warn, and when danger has not been in fact a possible motive. But what of this? We have words which may mean different things, and those we



use them to can distinguish which meaning is intended. Birds well may have such distinctions, too.

It is said that only one brood of young starlings is reared by the same pair of birds during the season. But I am not convinced. On the Tuesday morning the father starling—I knew him by his tail, which had lost a feather—was back for a while, searching about under the eaves. I fancied another nest, with the same or another mate, was in his mind: and on the following day the bird began to carry a little building material to a place under the eaves of our garden room. However it came to nothing. In 1902 our starlings were busy with their young in July; in 1903 they have had fledged young in May.

The swarm of the roosting wrens on a mid-winter evening I have kept for the end; intending with this to leave the birds; but I cannot leave them long; no form of wild life seems to me to be quite so exquisite as theirs, none in the watching has made me so tingle with joy since I was a little child. It was many years ago that I first found a bundle of warm wrens, about thirty in number, roosting in a hole in the thatch of an outhouse half surrounded by woods, in which wrens are abundant throughout the year. One afternoon in December 1903 it occurred to me that the coming night would be just the time for the wrens to roost in the thatch of this outhouse. I was a boy when I found the wrens there one night; roughly,

five-and-twenty years had passed, and I had never looked for the birds since. But the beautiful spiral evolutions of the red linnets on the common, as they gathered for the night, told me that many birds must be preparing against the hours of cold now beginning. The sun sank with a certain pageantry, that to the most casual watcher for weather signs might suggest another night of black frost. The glow seemed to waver between copper bright burnished and innermost fire; not spread over the sharp rim to flush the pale and nameless ground colour of the sky around. It was one of those fieriest suns into which men can look undazzled. A few minutes after it had gone down—it goes so fast under the horizon, you think you see it moving—the west was dipped in rose, and above and around this was plum colour. There was no running or shading off into each other of these colours. Soon after I found the birds calling to each other and gathering in the trees about the outhouse.

But the wrens were not yet among them. There came great titmice, blue titmice, cole titmice. The great titmice were shy. Several times they darted down as though to go boldly to their holes in the thatch, but courage failed them, and they were back in the trees.

Blue titmice and cole titmice followed more boldly. We saw several go into holes, and after a few minutes we went up, and putting in our

hands found them there. Soon the great titmice also went in, and when captured were much more defiant than the other birds. They would peck hard at our fingers: anger rather than fear flashed from their eyes while we held them. We released bird after bird, but, instead of flying far away, they stayed in the trees around, presently to return to their holes.

But now the wrens were coming in thickly, and we paid no more attention to the titmice. At half-past four fully two dozen were around us, some making the familiar watch or clock-winding sound, little troubled by our presence. As they grew in numbers, they looked like a swarm of large bees.

I walked closer, and stood within three yards of where they were gathering thickest at the edge of the low thatched roof. One or two of the birds clung to the thatch, or to the wooden side of the building within about one yard of my stretched-out arm. Some dropped to the ground under the holes in the thatch for which they were making, as bees will drop in the grass under their hive on a return journey, and thence sprang straight up into the holes.

Others flew on to the perfectly upright wooden sides, where they clung as easily as a fly stands on a wall or a ceiling; and the sight was as that of scurrying dead leaves driven by the wind against a wall. Others darted down from the trees or the sloping roof, dipped beneath its edge, hovered

there for some three seconds, and then shot up into the hole, or, if they had made a mistake, and there was not a hole there, darted to left or right, hovered again, and, finding a suitable hole, shot into it.

I have said that they resembled a swarm of bees about a hive; their hovering, however, also reminded one of another insect—the humming-bird hawkmoth.

Coming still nearer as the light thickened, we listened intently, and heard one swarming, clustering ball of feathers, as it grew bulkier and bulkier beneath the thatch, utter little sounds quite unlike any adult wren's ordinary sounds—just the little, creaky, peepy, immature cries which adult birds, however, do sometimes utter when their mates are feeding them.

How many wrens gathered in a single hole under the thatch I cannot say, for we did not wait till the end. In one hole we found three, but other and larger holes no doubt held many more. When these birds were released, they merely flew on to the roof or into a tree a few yards off, and no sooner had we retired a few steps than the swarms gathered once more. The three wrens which we took out of one hole were cuddled together in part of an old nest of a wren. One bird, which we roused, sprang back to the roof, and burst into a ditty, and then flew under the thatch again to sleep.



## CHAPTER V

### THE SECRET WOOD

THE great thing about the wood is its secretness. Day after day, at any season, one can wander for miles in it and meet with nothing to recall ties with the outer world. A trained or highly farmed wood, with parts regularly replanted and fenced off, could never have about it such an aloofness. Signs of order and art would appear in many places: there could be no sense of real wood-wildness. But in this wood the trees and the underwoods are self-sown, and have been time out of mind; the ash tree and the birch underwood broadcast, the wind carrying their seeds where it will, the oak and hazel depending largely for distribution on the mouse, the squirrel, and the bird. If the acorn or the nut had to grow on the spot where it fell under the parent tree, it would have small



chance of becoming a tree, wanting room and air: but the squirrel or the bird or mouse carries it off, to bury or drop it often on kinder ground. The dropped acorn has a chance, for the dead leaves soon cover it, so that by-and-by it may spring and take root. The buried acorn in numberless cases may never be sought for again by the wild creature that hides it; so presently a tiny tree appears, and if it escapes the rabbit, and has struck in good soil, it grows to be a sapling, and ends a full-grown oak. Thus Nature does her own sowing, and in early stages her thinning out, and man reaps her harvest. This may not be high farming of the woodlands, but it grows many oaks of sound heart-wood, and of bulk not to be despised when one bears in mind that the soil is not the yellow clay which the tree thrives in, and that the rival underwoods grow thickly about.

Two figures, only, of things not wild are seen on most days in the wood: neither robs the place of its secret quality. One is the woodman, the other the keeper. Both are so worked into the scene, so part of it, that their constant presence takes nothing from the sense that this is a little world of itself, intent on its own beauty, unravished by all that passes without. In mysterious lights, especially towards night, you may be half startled and half angry to see the tall form of some intruder who seems to be hiding and peering at you at the edge of one of the narrow

## 80 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

woodland rides or in a glade. But it always turns out to be either the gray trunk of an ash or the darker of an oak. Many people who have lived in a great wood or forest must have noticed how human a tree can appear a little distance away, at dusk or in the very early morning. Great woods, too, are haunted: this wood has long been: the haunt in such cases would often be the trunk of a tree.

The harvest of the woodman goes on through the year. In the winter he is cutting the crops of underwood of fourteen or fifteen years' growth. In the same season he is making bavins and faggots for firewood, wattle hurdles for sheep-pens; and there is hurdling during all the spring and summer. There is tree-felling and oak-bark stripping in April and May, and cutting and piling up into "cords" the lop and top of the trees. Every sound which the tools of the wood-workers make is good. The sound of the bark-stripper is best of all: it tells of sap running over, the life pulsing in the veins of the greening earth. But these sounds touch one, too, because they are those of one of the few simple and primitive employments of men, of work clean and upright as any in the world. I know of one who for forty years has sheared the sheep in June and worked in a wood the rest of the year. Here is the ideal life-work: mean thoughts and vice can find here no lodging to their taste. I recall only honest

toilers in the wood, no entirely mean one. This may be a happy or a limited experience, but I doubt very much whether you would easily find a really base woodman, by which I mean not a casual hand, but one whose working life is spent in the copse; who is there in all weathers and seasons, burned by the sun, soaked by the rains.

On a drenching winter day, with gun and dogs, I came down the rack—the narrow path which is cut through ripe underwood fifteen years old, and marks the end of one lot and the beginning of another—and stopped to talk with one old worker, who moved somewhat stiffly, though the wood went down before the clean and well-aimed strokes of his sharp billhook. In the generous heat of youth the man never made distinction between shine and storm. Often he would toil in heavy rains, taking no thought of shelter or dry clothes. The storms lashed him; wringing wet, he worked for hours, not changing his coat till he reached home at dusk. He can still, after half a century of wood-cutting and hurdling, work a long day, beginning with the light and ending not long before the night. But he has to repent the rashness of youth: he sets down all his ills of body, simply described as “inflammation,” to working in wet clothes in those lusty, long-gone days. Fine, dry weather in spring and early summer is best for the maker of wattle hurdles. Wet weather, in the end, will bend and

twist the strongest man with rheumatism. It is impossible to keep out the wet for very long. It must soak a man about the arms to the skin: the knees, in spite of protecting pads, will suffer, owing to the use that is made of them in pressing into place the split wands of hazel which make the warp of the hurdle. Very frosty weather, when the ground is crisp and the air a tonic, is by no means good for the hurdler; for the hazel wands are stiff, so that they cannot be weaved about the uprights in the frame. This frame is a curved piece of wood fixed to the ground, with ten holes into which the uprights are placed. As the wattle hurdle, finished and ready for sheep-pen, is straight, the reason for the curved frame is not always clear to a stranger to the craft. But the hurdler knows that it is easier to make a firm, compact hurdle in a curved frame than it would be in a straight; that when the time comes to trim the ends of the hazel wands it is easier to deal with the convex side first. One can scarcely tire of watching a deft, quick hand put the last touches with a sharp tool, looking half-hammer, half-chisel; he never misses his aim, or gashes a piece of wood that should not be touched. The convex side trimmed, he works the hurdle out of its frame, lays it flat on the ground, treads upon it lightly, to straighten and tighten it up; then a few untidy ends are snipped off the side that was slightly hollowed when in the frame, and the

hurdle is set on the pile at hand, and a new one begun.

In three days the old man had made but five hurdles: in one long day a quick, strong man has been known to make twelve, with the material by him and ready for use. It strikes home when a man measures his years by the lessening output of his strength: this tells the hard tale clearer than gray hairs or the lines on the face. But the old hurdler has not lost heart. He talks of the difficulty of hurdling on days of unending rain, without plaint as to his individual lot. Leaving his frame, and with it the shelter of the long wands piled against the tree and the thatched hurdles propped up lengthwise as a screen against the storms, he turns bravely to the dripping highwood, to cut and lay in lands or rows the hazel and oak stems.

The hurdler is the aristocrat among woodworkers. But his is a purple in which a man is not born. He must begin early in life—so soon as he leaves school—and serve years of apprenticeship. In past years I rarely roamed for hours through the woods without seeing a father or two with sons, the man at the frame wattling with hands and knees, the boys choosing out of the lands of felled wood, and cutting and bringing to him the wands. Now these family parties in the coppice are rarer: fewer young hurdlers are coming on: in a district famous for its hurdles less perhaps than half-a-dozen lads are being reared



## 84 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

to the work. The pay is better, but the will-of-the-wisp of the town lures away the younger men. Meanwhile the value of the wood sinks. Wood that sold for £10 an acre a quarter of a century ago will not fetch a third of the sum to-day. The value of the stripped and dried bark of the oak tree, too, has fallen: it was £10 a ton; it is scarcely more than £3. In old days the bread was baked in an oven heated by wood: bavins or faggots were heaped in and set alight, and soon the great fire crackled and roared, and made the bricks red-hot. It was a slow baking, and has given way to much quicker and more ingenious contrivances. The bavins may rot in the copse now for any use the town baker will make of them beyond that of kindling the fire. The loaves are not so good to eat, being over-cooked without, under-cooked very likely within, and with a certain deposit near the bottom crust. The shoe leather prepared by foreign chemicals is not so good to wear as the leather that was tanned by the good oak-bark. But there is more of both, and it is made quicker, and only the old folk grumble to us a little of the fall in quality. Nevertheless one would wish to eat, if it were possible, only the loaves baked in those old-fashioned ovens. There is something very good in the wood fire: loaves laid on its ashes must surely be sweeter, whether or not they are baked there more thoroughly than in coal ovens. Some of the older thatched cottages

in the villages still have ovens: the bundles of corn, which the women and children have leased in the fields, are sent to the miller, and out of the flour a few loaves are made at home in the late summer or autumn. No wonder men were hardy, and, in spite of pinching poverty, lived so often to a great age in the villages, when such cottage economy was widespread.

The oaks for timber, their bark for tanning, and the hazel wands for wattle hurdles, are the chief products of the wood where trees and coppice are mingled naturally; but firewood, though so little is wanted nowadays in the bread-making, can never go out of use. All the rougher and larger underwood, as well as the finer twigs and branches for kindling the fire in the open hearth, go into bavons, faggots, and knitches. The making of these, compared with the work of hurdling, calls for little skill, only a ready hand and endurance. Bavin and faggot are cut and made in the copse, bound about by withy or by a hazel wand which is twisted and made pliable: the knitch is the much longer and weightier bundle of rough underwood and thorn, cut and bound on the common where the village freeholder has this right as well as that of pasturing his cattle. The knitch is borne home on a long prong resting on the shoulder. You see an old body, man or woman, carrying one of these heavy bundles to the home a mile or more distant: now and then the bent figure will stop to shift

the burthen, that looks so far beyond the strength of the bearer, from one shoulder to the other; or to set the handle of the prong on the ground, and so have surcease for a few minutes from the weight. It is pathetic, as all figures of aged folk bowed under a burthen must be: but long habit ever dulled the pain: the journeys for fire-wood between village and common prolong active life rather than shorten it, the old folk getting, through these, so much more of the prime natural medicine, exercise in the open air.

Most of the smaller ash trees and the oaks above the first great forks are cut and split up with wedge and beetle for firing. Sometimes they are carried or dragged out of the wood uncut: at other times sawn and split in the coppice. Then the logs are piled up into what are known as cords, and often lie out for months. Soaked by the rains of a whole autumn and winter, they will be but the more seasoned. The careful housewife knows well that very dry logs burn too quickly. What is wanted in a wood fire is a certain amount of moisture: the ash tree, which makes the best fuel of all, will burn even when it is green wood: you can gather its ashes, which are so clean and white that they will scarcely soil the hand. The moist logs simmer in the open fire-place or the large fire-basket. There is no fire that is so companionable, and pleasant to feed, as one of ash logs. Always to be able to grow and cut and burn one's own

fuel would be no small advantage. Pope saw true and straight when he wrote of the happy lot of the man

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,  
Whose flocks supply him with attire ;  
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,  
In winter fire.

This is independence which men have in large measure forfeited ; exchanging it for the inventions and contrivances of progress, they have lost touch of the earth. But the root of the thing is in men still : it shows clear in the enthusiasm with which so many turn, after a long stretch of life spent apart from the earth, to husbandry and gardening. It is no *cult*—that is hateful trumpery.

Even more than the hurdler, the gamekeeper is of the atmosphere of the wood, parcel of the scene. One can feel no pride in one's knowledge of the wood when it is matched against the keeper's. But for the mere writing, he is a geographer down to many minute features of the wood. If he had the niceness of hand, he could draw from memory a map of the place in fine detail. Once I thought my knowledge of the rabbits' burrows, and the foxes' earths large ; but it never would have bulked so, pitted against his. I believe that he could even set on the map the chief winter runs—the high-roads—of the rabbits, over hundreds of acres in certain places

which he most frequents. He knows the succory clumps where the flocks of ring-doves roost—with them a few stock, which he styles rock, doves; the trees into which pheasants go cocketing at dusk; whether there is now a badger in the wood, and, if so, exactly where; how many crows, if any, live in the wood. He knows the haunts of stoat and weasel; the bushes and bramble beds which are sure to hold rabbits. The glades, the thickets, the chief trees, the pits, the ditches, the hollows—these would all be on the map; they are the landmarks by which he is able to go straight and sure to the spots where he has laid his snares for ground game or vermin. It is only in knowledge of the best spots and times for watching the small birds, the butterflies and moths, in fern and flower, that it is easy to find his superior in local woodlore. His chances for seeing and studying these things are unrivalled: the woodman, set for whole days in the same spot, intent on his hurdle, has far less chance of becoming intimate with the lesser life of the place. But the keeper says that it is a long time since he has had the wish, or the time, to look after small birds and their nests. He can sympathise with the pursuit, it must be intelligible to him in the young, for as a bird-nesting boy he knew the passion himself. In those days he could climb, unaided by irons, any tree in the woods or common, except, it may be, the avenue of great spruce firs. Once get



these wiry arms of his half-way round the trunk of oak or ash tree, rough or smooth, and he was sure to reach the first large branch; after this, with a good climber, who is not afraid of dizziness, it is little more, in the case of our oak trees, than stepping from rung to rung to the top of a long ladder. Climbing the oaks after hawks' nests and crows', wandering on the common with cows, out all weathers all times of the year—this made him as tough as the ground ash that grows in the Withy Bed. To judge by the way he faces the worst weather, you might doubt whether rain or snow or burning sun hurt him more than the wiriest, wildest creatures, feathered and furred, whose haunts are his for many hours each day of the year, and often at night too. He has kept his alertness, his supple limb, partly through the simple food to which he sits down twice a day: the third meal may often be eaten out of doors while he is moving from burrow to burrow, or waiting for a rabbit to bolt. It is a mistake to suppose that men must sit down or keep still when breaking a fast, if the food is to be digested. It is not the moving about during meals that hurts—it is the sluggish, artificial life indoors. Every morning in autumn and winter he is up and out in the dark, to make the long round of his wires, to put into his pockets, or into a sack which he carries, the ground game that has been snared. Many wires, too, have to be taken up and reset.

The man's carrying power is amazing. Harled and strung on a stout stick resting on the shoulder, he would think little of a dozen rabbits and hares as a burthen borne miles through brier and brambles and thick underwood stems. And his pockets grow heavier and heavier the while. Out shooting on a winter day, he has carried a dozen head of game for me and made light of it, all the time beating the bushes and cheering the dogs to work. When alone, I hide game when it becomes irksome to carry. The keeper never will hide game, with the plan of coming back and getting it later. If you do so, you will very likely lose it, is his notion. It would seem that somewhere in the loneliest spots there may be eyes or noses concealed, await for such prize. Therefore he must carry everything, and never hide a rabbit even: once he held thirty head of game, staggering a little under the dead weight.

To the keeper, the butterflies and small birds and flowers are the unconsidered trifles of the wood. His enthusiasm is for such things of prey as you can set a snare for, or track by their spoor in the wet clay of the woodland rides or the snow. For several seasons we entertained a stag which must long before have grown wild. It would leave the woods some night only to return again days or weeks after. The keeper tracked it by its spoor in the wet clay, and now and then caught sight of it as it roamed and browsed by moonlight. Wary and fearful, it lay

hid in the quietest and deepest parts of the wood by day, only stirring after dark to eat and drink. News of this noble beast's refuge went abroad: some would have hunted it, others lay in wait at the edge of the wood to shoot it in the fields at night. Coming across the brow one day down into the brambly hollow, I saw the stag rise up and with great stride make for the high underwoods. When nothing was seen or heard of the stag for a week or more by the keeper, we feared that it had been shot by a neighbour, but this was not its end. In the wood he was safe with us by day, in his roamings by right he managed to escape all human enemies. But it seems that one night by some cruel mishap he entangled himself among barbed wire in a hedge among the hills, and was found hanging stiff and stark.

You cannot expect the gamekeeper or the gardener to flinch from the pain which he has in his calling to inflict. From responsibility for the infliction of pain it is impossible for any one on earth quite to escape. A man abstains from meat, he does not wear shoes because these are made from the hides of slaughtered animals: this, though nobly meant, is no escape, for a myriad living things must be destroyed by or on behalf of those who eat fruit, corn, and green food. Pain and death, life and love, are close interwaved in the texture of each man's lot. There is no separating the threads. It is not \*

true to say that the pursuit of wild creatures must make a man inhumane; any more than it is true that to eat meat, which means the slaughter of innocent animals, or green food, which can only be grown at the cost of countless lives in obscure but beautiful form, makes him so. Keepers, as a class, are sometimes accused of brutality. But a sweeping condemnation of a whole class can only be vain and superficial; you might as reasonably condemn a nation; to judge one man intelligently, you have to unweave the painful web of motive and circumstance; and with no two men has God's web been weft in just the same manner. I have seen no special inhumanity in the keeper. He does not wantonly take life or hurt it. But he wages unrelenting war against the creatures of prey in the woodlands. Jays, owls—brown, white, or long-eared—he lets be: carrion-crows, stoats, and weasels are always his quarry. In his waistcoat pocket is a small phial holding a sinister, bluish powder. Coming one day upon a family of weasels, which darted into a hole, he set a dead rabbit outside and used his phial. Next day, he found that the weasels had been to the rabbit. So there was one family of weasels less in the wood. But this terrible little phial comes into play only as an extreme measure. Near where we stood talking of this, was a small hazel wood archway, a foot in length, built between the exposed roots of an oak. At one end

of this archway or passage the keeper had set a gin and covered it with mould and leaves. This was a trap for a stoat, which had been seen once or twice at the spot of late. Stoats and weasels are greatly tempted to enter and run through little tunnels and passages of this kind, and many are caught by this device. I have heard of a number of both animals being caught one after another in the same passage, the trap being scarcely hidden. Sometimes the passage is made by stones piled up and covered with turf or clods of earth. Though the stoat, as probably the weasel, hunts by scent—or, when close, by sight, simply bounding after the quarry—it no doubt enters such passages expecting prey of some sort. Paths and tracks, even of the roughest, made by people pushing their way through the herbage in woods and thick places, are often followed by beasts of prey: curiosity may impel them to this, with hope of prey at the back of it: disturb the plants and bushes about a bird's-nest, and it is very likely that, when next you visit the spot, you will find the eggs sucked or the young killed and carried off. It is the way of some creatures of prey to pry into such disturbances. I have noticed this myself, and others have told me the same.

But two stoats in this wood are rarely to be taken in the same passage. Here they are very wary, so that many a lure fails. When a stoat has killed a rabbit above ground and in an open



glade, as a rule it will drag the body to cover. Sometimes the stoat drags the rabbit to a bush or bramble bed: then it enters the cover, and, well concealed, sucks the blood of its prey which is lying just without. There are stoat paths or runs among small bushes and coarse wood-grasses and plants; at one end of such a run you may find a rabbit, which the stoat dragged thither and will make more than one meal of—it is a mistake to think that it feeds on its prey only once. The keeper sets his trap in the run, hoping that by-and-by, perhaps after dark, the stoat will return to its prey. But, if the stoat does return, it is by no means always that the trap will be sprung: the animal may scent danger, and so approach the rabbit from another direction, or, mistrusting the newly turned earth and dead leaves which are spread over the pan of the trap, he may even climb up into the stems above his run and drop down a few inches the other side.

Men and dogs are the only foes which the stoat and weasel need fear in the wood, unless it be a ferret, their near relative, before which, I believe, both always take to flight. Very few stoats and weasels in the wood can ever have been chased and scared by man, dog, or ferret. But they are evidently born with a strong instinctive dread of the man and the dog. How far the dread of man goes back in the history of the stoat or weasel we can form no notion;

in very early days I can scarcely think it likely that the stoat in England was pursued at all by men; for game was not preserved then, and the skin of the animal was too small to be sought after by rude people. And yet it is hard to imagine the stoat or the weasel even in such times a different creature from what it is to-day. Instinct is the word we use of this animal's fear of men and dogs. But how do stoats and weasels, hotly chased by dogs, know that their chance of escape is to climb a tree? Chased by men, they will often bound straight away, though there are trees at hand to climb, if they will. Chased closely by dogs, they will climb trees—their best chance of escape. Once a weasel bolted before our ferret: there were plenty of trees about, but, being unpursued by dogs, it merely darted away among the underwood stems. On another occasion, a weasel was turned out of some bavins piled round an oak. The dogs rushed at it just as it reached and sprung up a tree. In a third case, a stoat was turned out of a rabbit burrow by a ferret. Two terriers instantly gave chase. But the stoat ran up to the top branches of an oak. The keeper pelted it, and the dogs barked furiously. The stoat then became confused and sprang to the ground, where it was instantly seized and killed. In both these cases the chased creature, flying for life, seems to have acted swiftly on some impulse of reason rather than instinct—that is, if instinct be *blind*. And what

has made the stoat often beware of treading on leaves and mould slightly disturbed in one of its own runs, though it will enter without fear the tunnel or covered passage of the trapper? What, again, has taught it to drag its prey from the open to cover?

Stoats and weasels are animals of strong character and passion. *Στοργή*, the absorbing affection of the parent for the offspring, is strong with them. The rage of rivalry leads sometimes to fierce battle among the males. A friend of mine saw a stoat duel one day, and he believes that, had he not disturbed the animals, it must have been to the death. These stoats fought a stark fight, rolling and twisting round each other's lithe bodies and biting with a rare intensity of hate. When fear of man ended the duel, the stoats made for cover, the weaker limping away, just alive.

It is *στοργή* which arms the doe rabbit, making of her a hero on behalf of her helpless young. At this time, she fearlessly gives battle to a stoat, and will drive him off. This strange contest, ending in the easy triumph of the rabbit, which at other seasons is often paralysed at the sight of a stoat, is familiar enough to the keeper. He speaks of a doe rabbit "driving" a stoat. Once a keeper in a neighbouring wood saw a doe rabbit so kick and buffet a stoat that it "chattered" and took to flight. Stoats, attacked by a rabbit, seem as unnerved as ordinarily the

rabbit would be: they make no attempt to fasten to the neck and kill. The doe takes a wise precaution when for long she leaves her nest of young: if the nest is in a "stop"—that is, a single hole dug for the purpose—the entrance is filled up with earth and dead leaves when the mother is out feeding. My experience is that the mother leaves her young during the day, if they are in a stop, not a burrow with several holes; but perhaps this is not always her way. *Στοργή*, as White said, sublimates the passions. There is no virtue of men and women, even the most spiritual, on which we set a higher value than the love of parents for their living children. This virtue is common to bird and beast.

The country folk are often nice judges and prophets of weather. It is a subject which never loses savour for them. People who are better to do, and have many more worldly interests, pass a worn jest about weather talk. It is supposed to be a banal subject; and banal it is when the talkers do not know a weather sign; otherwise it is one of the most natural and interesting subjects which a man could attend to. Trees, too, and crops and rivers and stars can no doubt be banal.

The keeper is one of the folk who watch the weather with concern, as well he may. But soaking rain, wind, or frost never altered by ten minutes, I believe, his time of rising against the day's toil. You may be abroad in the woods

before it is fully light—but the day began for the keeper an hour or two since. Every morning he must go his long round to gather the ground game which he has snared. The keeper needs no written aids to memory. He has scores of snares to visit, over a large extent of thick wood and common: his memory rarely if ever plays him false as to the position of a single snare. When a lad, I could go straight to many nests of blackcaps, garden warblers, and willow-wrens in the thickets: it is not always so easy now to go straight to two or three, if a few days have passed since I found them. In very early days we used to cut blazes on the trees and underwoods to mark the way to our hazel and bracken fern huts among the oaks. The keeper or the poacher, where he does need such help, will be content with marks on a much smaller scale. The poacher, where he trusts to memory, is not so sure of his bearings as the keeper. He will now and then set trifling marks on the underwood and bushes to guide him to the spots where his snares have been set. The fresh spoor of the poacher in the clay and soft leaf-mould about the haunts of game, or the series of small snaptwig which marks the way to his wires, are alluring to track and follow up. I remember the boyish thrill over such a tracking; how we found, and followed till we lost them, the marks on the wood one winter day. When a poacher's snare is found, the keeper may hide in the fern or



thickets, and wait for many hours. But not every snare yields a snarer; the poacher, for he too is full of the craft of the deep wood, may watch the keeper.

Men eager for knowledge of wild creatures won by wood folk seek often in vain. The knowledge is there: but it cannot be forced out. Ask these folk to tell you what they know of beast and bird—the result will often be disappointing. You cannot so tap these springs of knowledge: it is better to let them trickle slowly and naturally to the surface. Matching his craft so many days in each year against that of the rabbit, the keeper has a high opinion of this animal's wariness. From time to time little memories of the odd, wise devices of rabbits flash on him. He gives these with something of delight. A droll instance of a rabbit's shyness of the snare was on a brilliant moonlit night. The snarer was watching the rabbits moving about on the turf among the runs where his wires were set. As he stood, holding in his straining dog, he saw a rabbit come along a well-trod run till it almost touched the wire. But, instead of going into the noose, the rabbit nimbly leapt it, and ran to feed on the other side: now a hare would have fallen a victim. The keeper can tell how rabbits, which have been shot at when crossing an open space or ride in the woodlands, will often for a time shun these spots. Driven from their forms by dog or beater, they will turn back, even take

to the open, rather than cross rides which they believe to be dangerous. There is not a doubt that he says the truth. The wild rabbit has memory and presence of mind till, through the number of dogs and guns, he grows hopelessly confused.

There is a curious story that the doe rabbit has to guard her young against the buck rabbit. I do not know how far it is true, but there are cases of the kind among wild creatures and tamed. What may be called unnatural conduct of bird, beast, and insect towards their young occurs in several distinct forms. With the tamed are those horrid cases of animals devouring their young to whom much attention has been given by human beings. Then there are swallows and martins which leave their late broods to perish miserably in the nest; the instinct of migration overmastering even the passion of the parent. Other cases of birds deserting their young before these have reached *ἡλικία*, the state of maturity, are rarely if ever recorded. Yet we know to what risks and alarms they are put very often by clinging to their young. As the eggs break and the young grow, the love of the parent birds for them waxes stronger and stronger: that it should ever, just at its height, suddenly be mastered by the magnet of migration is strange. The third case is easier to understand. When the young have reached the state of *ἡλικία* they are in some cases driven by the father—if not by both parents—

from the spot where they were reared. It is so with robins, and probably with some other birds. When the young are full fledged, and able to take care of themselves, the *στοργή* of the parent bird is succeeded by *ἀντιστοργή*. But this is far from universal: love dies at the root, but this hatred or rivalry does not always succeed; by an exquisite arrangement of Nature the fledged young of a first brood may even bear a part in the rearing of the young of a second brood, as with the song thrushes and moor-hens. For months after the young long-tailed tits have reached maturity, and *στοργή* has died out, the whole family, parents and children, keep together whilst hunting from tree to tree in the day: at dusk they will roost in a close bunch or cluster of feathers, so that the ten or twelve minute creatures look as one fair-sized bird. Later the family sense will be lost in the spirit of the flock.

At night it is that the furred and haired things of the wood move in their element: rabbit and field-mouse, the foxes, the badgers, the mole, the dormouse. The last is a link between the true mouse and the squirrel. This beautiful little creature prefers, I think, the thickets of brier and blackthorn on the common to the hazel and oak underwoods. On the common, when the leaf is off, I have often found his nest, a round ball of dried grasses of the size of a large man's fist. Herein at autumn the builder will

collect a small store of food with which to fatten himself up against the winter when he is to sleep, though not so sound as the hedgehog or urchin buried in the dead leaves beneath. There is a very quiet lane on one side of the common, which leads to hidden hamlets and to the clump of storm-blasted pines where the ravens nested of old. Great thickets of blackthorn and bramble grow here, and on the side of the lane are wheat-fields. A dormouse, whose nest I found lately in one of these thickets, had crossed the lane and gleaned in the stubbles. The husks of corn lay in a little heap in the bottom of the nest. But many dormouse nests, which we find in the bushes and stems in winter, are empty. It is many years since the cowboys brought me one that held its builder. The warmth of the hand would gradually awaken it. In a spinney in mid June, far away from this common, I found a dormouse's nest hung in a brier. It was a hollow ball woven of the finest strips of dried grasses, with a little sheep wool. I could find no entrance. The mother, leaving her nest by day like the doe rabbit, had sealed it up so carefully that it was impossible to tell even where the entrance had been. She must have sat in the stems, after leaving her tiny raw and blind young, and drawn and weaved the grasses over the door. The enemies she guards her young against may be insects of prey like the wasps; but warmth has also to be kept in the nest when she is away for

hours perhaps. The harvest-mouse shuts the door not less tightly than the dormouse. It would have been a joy to see this dormouse nest in the spinney being built. The skill of the builder must be as delicate and subtle as that of the long-tailed titmouse or the golden wren. It was hung perfectly secure among the stems, yet no silky thread nor cocoon was used by the builder. A few yards away a blackcap had built its nest in the brambles. This too was a hanging nest, with no support below, fixed firm without the aid of the webs or cocoons which blackcaps often use. The goose grasses, mixed with a little moss, were bent over and round the stems; the whole so slight that the three eggs might have been seen through the sides: through the frail shells the pink yolks showed.

How did the dormouse and blackcap learn to make these nests, and hang them to brier and bramble? There may be argument in favour of the view that they learnt their art by memory and imitation. But I cannot believe it. How often do you see wild English birds watching others of their own kind build nests? The young thrushes which help to feed the second brood, the young greenfinches, if they do the same, might have special opportunities for learning something of nest-making in their first year of life. But I cannot think that even they need teaching. The bird and the dormouse must be



born architects—like the mason-bees. That some are born better architects than others, even of the same species, seems most probable; and their building may well improve with practice, like their singing. Nobody ever imagined that the tree-wasp took lessons in building. And yet in its way the nest of the titmouse or the golden wren is not more wonderful than the hanging, hemispheric one of the wasp. In a ramble one day I found one of these, with its layers and layers of thin, gray paper-like substance and its tiers of cells. The wonder and delight over the discovery flash upon me to-day after so many years. It was in the same wood; within a yard of the very spot, the redstart warmed her choice blue-green eggs a summer since; only the wood was more unbounded then, the green deeps deeper than to-day, for they lay in the undiscovered land of childhood.



*"The Green Deep."*





## CHAPTER VI

### DAYS FROM THE WOOD DIARY

It would be delightful to trace the long story of the wood from very early times: in imagination to hunt and house with the flint man, whose flakes lie about the brow where the stag made its lair: to watch the fighting people of a later age dig the dyke which runs through the centre of the wood. There was a tradition that no human hands made this dyke, that it simply marks the course of the devil in one of his earthly flights. But this tradition, I think, has died out. We would be by the new-made barrow when a warrior

was set to rest. Then, from the glimmering dawn of English consciousness, through the long period of forest law, we would enter into the spirit of the villein, the archer, the verderer, the poacher. Even the title-deeds would almost carry us back to the days of hart and hind and a stern forest law. Stark blows, who could doubt it, were here in lonely spots rained down at dark. During the Civil Wars men openly banded together, townsmen and villagers, labourers, yeomen, tradesmen, with a gentleman or two. They came with their cross-bows, guns, and mastiffs, to kill the bucks and fawns, with other beast and fowl of the forest, chase and warden. This was more than two and a half centuries ago, and yet among the names one may recognise perhaps some of the ancestors of humble folk who live in the villages around. Till a far later date, we would beat the bounds when a new lord of the manor came by his own, and would sit in his courts.

That would be but one side, the human. We would follow, too, the story of the wild life from the days of the wolf and boar. We should hear the red kites scream, watch the buzzards spire, and track to their haunts the polecat and pine marten. We should come down to our own day, and trace the life story of each kind of thing that lives in the wood, tree and plant, bird, beast, and insect. No inventory or calendar of the beautiful forms of life in a great wood to-day, made truly and in fine detail, would be unworthy. But the



shortness of life, the swift flight of the days which we may give to a single branch of interest and beauty, makes such a task impossible. The hours spent among the woods and hills and by the river are so crowded. All we can hope for is to watch and rejoice in a little here, a little there. After all, it is a sip, and no more, even when we go to the wilds with the happy spirit, with the mind receptive of all the influences of Nature.

I would like to keep faithfully the diary of the wood for even a few seasons without a break. Kept for, say, twenty years without fail, such a diary would show changes and shiftings in both winged and leaved things, which could not but be of curious interest to a wood lover. Men rarely live long enough to see a generation of trees come and go: of the slow, sure oak, few can even say how much greater such and such a tree has grown since first they knew it. These changes are imperceptible. But lesser changes are marked by the eye that cares. I have watched Solomon's seal spreading away from the hanger, the rose bay willow herb settling in new spots, whilst it grows thicker in the old spots which one knew so well in childhood. The hawfinch comes in the winter to the shrubbery and feeds on the lawn: there was no hawfinch here of old days. The bee orchis, chocolate-brown and mauve, has planted itself on a gentle slope in the south park. I could swear there never was one here when I was a

child: I would not believe the bee orchid had really come, until I saw the flower one summer day; for long ago I searched the wood and clearings and the hanger for years and never saw it. Near by, among brake-fern and birches, where the tree pipit builds, the fragrant white butterfly orchid grows thickly; and this flower, too, is a new-comer to this part of the wood. The rare toothwort now thrives in one strong clump under the shade of the firs. How this strange, flesh-like thing found its way to a heap of sticks and decaying plant matter under the larch by the road, no one could say. This, I feel sure, was never overlooked in flower-hunting, bird-nesting days; it was not there. With herb Paris or one berry it is otherwise: I know, through an old record, that it was growing under the beech trees on the hanger long ago; but it is only a few months since I saw it for the first time. There are some things we count on seeing season after season, through a life, at the appointed time and place, and are never disappointed in. I have thought of a procession of them, when sleep has been hard, and they have made a kind of opiate of sound and smell and colour. There are the wild bees that fill their honeycombs under the roof of the porch, fetching in early spring the pollen from the wood sallows, and murmuring later in the great limes. There never were such good daffodils as those which grow in the rough grass

under these trees between house and wood ; yet they are flowers with small trumpets, little other than wild daffodils. The florist might root them up as worthless weeds. They have no story to tell to a stranger, and in the story of flowers lies hid half their beauty.

Wild bees coming home, their thighs laden with the sallow's yellow dust, daffodils under the limes, toothwort at the root of the larch, the first willow-wren's song, the oak-bark strippers in the copse—these mark azure days in the calendar of spring, coming somewhat in the order given. Another spring day is to be remembered through the spire and hover of the burnished dove. He will mount above the oak, where he has been uttering the burning notes, hover in mid-air, and drop to the tree from which he sprang. This sometimes may be seen much later in the year, and at dawn. Mr. W. Bartholemew gave me a description of the ring-dove's rapture as he saw it once later in the year: "The sun yet unrisen, the summer mists just lifting. A pair of wood-pigeons rose almost vertically, with loud-flapping wings, to throw off the dew, to a great height. Then gracefully they swooped down to the exact spot where they had started from and had roosted all night. Previously not a sound could be heard in the woods, but now birds awakened everywhere, and greeted a new day."

In the wood calendar, butterflies for light and

## 110 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

moths for dusk, are often features of a day or a certain distinct period. The sulphur, the holly-blue, the two pearl-bordered fritillaries—these four butterflies in their first appearance mark three distinct periods in the calendar. First the sulphur: it appears with the warm days of very early spring. But properly the sulphur is not the first butterfly of the season: it is a sleeper roused, and really belongs to the year that is gone. Butterfly sleep and butterfly travel are wonderful and mysterious. We know how a butterfly shrinks from cold in the summer, is dulled by a few heavy clouds that shut the sunshine from the earth, is torpid and but half alive on a stormy day. This sulphur revels in the hot sun as much as any butterfly. Yet the bitterest winter will not kill it in its retreat among the faggots or bavins in the copse. It sleeps adamant against weeks of black frost, and snow, and east wind. It sleeps a sleep of tremendous depth: no sound nor shock can wake it—if a sulphur or a tortoiseshell butterfly took up its winter quarters on the outside of a cathedral bell, the clang and clash which shakes a tower would not wake it: it is sealed against sound as against cold. A man of, as we say, iron strength, exposed for a few nights to the cold through which the butterfly sleeps safely, would die. That there is cold on the earth too intense even for a butterfly to live through, is quite likely; but after the worst

winter in England, the sulphur and the tortoiseshell come forth, and in far larger numbers than many people imagine, to dance in the sun. Why has Nature given to a few kinds of butterflies, scarcely more than half a dozen in England, this power to resist cold, with the instinct to hide through the winter, and the surety to awake when there is warm air and sun again? We can only guess an answer. It looks very like a wise plan to preserve these forms of butterfly life. The sleeping insect often awakes, one can hardly doubt, to lay its eggs and then speedily die. It was for this, consciously or not, that the sulphur butterfly in September was laying in stores against its long sleep. At the sun-steeped corner of the deep-rutted lane, I watched the sulphurs, some light and freshly hatched, others a little bleached and battered, busy where red mint and wild basil flowers grow. They visited blossom after blossom of the basil, working with the concentration of the honey bee. Whatever basil holds, aromatic oil or honey, the butterfly, I could not doubt, was drawing it out for sustenance. Life is spending itself even in this deepest of trances; in the case of the quadruped, so the learned can tell us, fibre of muscle, more irritable as the trance is deeper, is being worn out. So the sleeper must fatten up before going into winter quarters, as the dormouse and the hedgehog fatten. The exact nature of these sleeps, how they are produced, is obscure. But



in the sleep of the butterfly or the dormouse in winter, the snail in the drought of summer, and the trances into which men have been thrown, there are common features which point to near relationship. Even with the sleep-walker the same phenomena are noticed. It may be that some student of these beast and butterfly trances one day will be able to turn his knowledge to cunning account on behalf of human life. If we could stave off the winter of life so, and like the butterfly wake to a new spring! But why have our birds not learnt to do as the butterfly and the dormouse and bat? I never could wonder, bearing in mind how common these trances are, that, of old, men firmly believed that the swallows in winter slept massed together in eaves or even under water.

The little holly or azure blue is the first of our wood butterflies to hatch out of the chrysalid in the spring. A few cloudy minutes will dispirit most of these honey and heat lovers. But the holly-blue often flies on days when there is more hail than sun. Later on, I have seen him by the river and in the garden, revelling in hot May suns: once even in the heat of summer on the pavement of a crowded city street. But in the calendar of the wood his month is April, his haunt the hazel coppices coming into leaf. Many butterflies are curiously attached to one small piece of ground. I watched a sulphur butterfly in early April

about a deserted garden. He would leave the garden now and again, to cross the brook and fly along the lane beyond, but he would always come back to this small strip of twenty yards or so: in the empty cottage or outhouse, to which the garden belonged, perhaps the butterfly had passed the winter; and, the weather growing cold again, he might return to his quarters under the thatch. But I have not seen the holly-blues of the wood stay in the same place. There can be little honey for them in the April woods, unless it be in the sweet-scented palm; their quick, wandering flight among the hazels tells, I think, of a search not for honey or sunshine, but for mates.

The upper sides of the English butterflies' wings, unlike those of moths, rarely match their surroundings. The grayling butterfly in August, among the cones and litter of the pine woods, is one of the few cases of the kind I can recall: the white bars on the dark wings of the white admiral might suggest the play of light and shade, when the sun shines through our hazel coppices among which this butterfly floats with rare grace; but this would be to carry the theory about the dappled skin of the fallow deer a long way. The holly-blue in flight, also when settled and sunning itself, does not match its environment: nor can I see any matching when the wings are folded and the butterfly rests on the stem or the leaf. We may turn then to another

theory of colour. The beauty of the holly-blue may be the result of the favour felt by the female for the finest-looking suitors. To our eyes the male butterfly is often finer than his mate, as the cock bird is finer than the hen; and if we believe in this theory of colour and marking, we must also believe that the bird's or the butterfly's idea of beauty is very much ours. But the case of the holly-blue is rather singular. Here, contrary to the general rule, the female is more striking than her mate. With the emperor, the orange-tip, and the common blue, the male is far finer than his mate. But, with a broad band of black round the outside of her fore wings, the female holly-blue is finer than the male. How, if the theory of sexual selection applies to this beautiful little butterfly, has the superiority of the female to the male come about?

These blustering days of spring are not for the orange-tip butterfly. Orange-tip morning is all sun. The coppice is growing blue with hyacinth, and the leaves of the wood spurge are bright as flowers, when this butterfly comes. Like the rare and feeble little wood white, the orange-tip rarely comes till the hazels and even the oaks are leafing. That is one of the prettiest of images founded on the wild life of the woods and fields—"a butterfly life"; and of all butterflies this orange-tip in its sun-dance does appeal to us as the lightest, most wayward of living

things. It seems to have no goal, no plan, save that of dancing out a careless life among the leaves and flowers. I never could see a sign of the faintest sense of direction even in an orange-tip. But is the orange-tip after all so feather-brained, so wanton, as he seems? I am not so sure that he is, when I think of what a friend has told me in exchange for something which I told him about another butterfly, *Artemis*, the fritillary of the marsh. On several days running I saw this fritillary sunning itself on a small patch of exposed chalk by the river side. On each day I saw the butterfly at the same time, about one o'clock; and on each occasion, on my approach, it rose and flew quickly across the river, where it was lost to sight in the rank herbage of the water-meadows. It was the same fritillary—I recognised it—the same hour, the same resting-spot, and the flight was taken in the same direction. That the patch of chalk was its fixed and favourite abode, there is no doubt. My friend came upon two orange-tips sleeping on a flower one afternoon. Next day he saw what he took to be the same pair asleep on the same flower. In both these cases there must have been a strong sense of direction and place. Had the flower or the patch of chalk been moved a few yards, the butterfly might have lost its bearings. If I were to move my bee-hive a few yards from where it now stands, those bees, which chanced to be out foraging at the time, on their return with a load

## 116 THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH

of honey or pollen, would be perplexed or even lost for ever to the hive, though it stood on the open ground only those few yards off. But the same fixed flower and the same garden will again and again draw back from its roamings the butterfly that has once tasted the pleasure. Thus I have seen the large tortoiseshell sail, and the silver-studded blues flit over the wall, only to return after a while to the garden and flowers of their choice. They must have the homing instinct strong.

Two butterflies, Euphrosyne and Selene, pearl-bordered and small pearl-bordered fritillaries, I never could think of apart from the short, glorious period of crowded life and rapture, which crowns the throned summer. Once to have tasted this time in the hazel coppices, it is a kind of sin not to watch for and taste it hereafter. If rain and hot sun share the day at this time—which is in May or in June, or sometimes in both—the woods smell as good as a bean-field in blossom. Orange-tip and holly-blue may be a little past their prime, but here are the two little coppice fritillary butterflies, and with them dingy and grizzled skippers, as moth-like in mien as the silver gamma, which is out now and flying by day. In some seasons there is an abundance, too, of the Duke of Burgundy fritillary. The pearl-bordered fritillaries are lovely for the first hours of their lives. Then they have a velvety bloom about them. How exquisite in its detail is the



checkered pattern on the under side of the wing of the small pearl-bordered fritillary! The humble bees are weighing down the blooms of yellow archangel. The fritillary butterflies attend only to the flowers of the lowly bugle; it has marriage priests and to spare, the bugle, if its pollen is ready when the fritillaries come from their chrysalids.

Thinking of the fritillary and the bugle flower, I can see the pathway up the little hollow with gentle slopes on either hand. In the birch thickets near by, the nightingales nest, where the brake-fern is uncrumpling its fronds brown and hairy beneath, not unlike the foot of some small animal. It was while lying and watching among such birches for a nightingale's nest, a year or two ago, that a belief I had held from childhood was shaken—that the nightingale never sings after the young are all out of the shells. Soon a hen nightingale flew into a hazel stem near where I lay, and her bearing told me that she had just come from her nest. There was a certain exquisite tremulousness about her. She took no notice of me, as I remained absolutely still. Her body vibrated intensely for a few seconds, and then again, after a pause, for another few seconds, as in an ecstasy; and several times she spread out a red-brown tail like a fan, deliberately opening and closing it.

By-and-by I saw her, with caterpillars in her bill, fly down into a tuft of nettles and brambles.

The cock bird followed with more food, and this took place several times. I then knew that I could go and look at the nest and young when I chose, so I continued to watch the birds. Again, and more than once, the hen shivered or vibrated in the way I have tried to describe; but I know it could not be described; it was too subtle for clumsy words. It had nothing whatever to do with her toilette; once she did attend to her toilette, and then she shook out her feathers in ordinary bird way, and preened herself. She was quite silent, but the cock bird never ceased "kurring" and crying something which the books describe as "wate, wate!" but which to my ears does not much resemble the sound those letters make.

Twice, during the hour or so that I waited, there were short bursts of nightingale song, each lasting perhaps three or four seconds. I am as certain as I can possibly be that the nightingale which thus sang was the nightingale which was "kurring" and helping to feed the young. Presently I went to the tuft and found directly the nest and the four young, which had just begun to open their eyes. It was a typical nightingale nest in its build, place, and material; quite on the ground, made outside wholly of dead oak leaves, inside of coarse soft dead grasses and fibres. It matched its environment.

So engrossed by the sweets of the bugle are the pearl-bordered fritillaries, Selene and Euphrosyne,

that with thumb and forefinger I have often picked them off a flower, to examine their pattern, and then suffer them to go back to the feast. The holly-blue I have taken prisoner in the same way, as he has walked on the hazel leaf. The skippers are warier, and the Duke of Burgundy fritillary—which is not really a fritillary, though colour and marking have given him the name—fresh from the chrysalid, is almost impossible to take without a net. These little butterflies seem to have small appetite for honey; the Duke exults in the sun, opening and shutting his wings as he sits on a leaf or the underwoods. Here, at the corner of the wood, on the thymy down, among the twayblade and butterfly orchids and bird's-foot trefoil, yellow dabbled with blood-red, there were green hairstreaks with the skippers and fritillaries. But I have not seen one for years. The green hairstreak, its wings folded, does match its environment closely: yet even with this advantage against enemies, it grows scarcer in some spots.

In the grassy glades, at the edge of the wood, the heavy burnet moth, with his coarse clubbed antennæ, moves without a perceptible beat of his wings from flower to flower, visiting many but settling on few. As a caterpillar he fed heavily and went into winter quarters like the sulphur. Rock-rose and thyme he passes by, to settle at length on a bloom of the bird's-foot trefoil. The burnet's dress is splendid, crimson, bronze,

and true black, all in a sheen. Mr. Hardwick has told me that he saw them poised over the flower of the tufted vetch, a rare combination of colour: but a certain sluggishness takes from the beauty of the burnet: in insects we admire alertness and strength of flight not less than fine colours. The red and coal-black cinnabar moth, which flies with the burnets in June, is still feebler on the wing. How different from the silver gamma, at times so lightning swift, that when it leaves one flower we lose sight of it till it reaches another, and stops to hover there. How many beats of the gamma's wing to each second of hover? His wings whirl with such intense swiftness that they look stationary; it is as though the insect were hanging in the air by some unseen thread. If this minute mechanism of motion were slowly perfected by evolution, how many years may not the gamma moth, as we see him to-day, have been in the making? These things are practically as hard for the mind to grapple with as endless space or time.

Divine days come sometimes in July. We should leave the path through the wood, even though it is narrow and overgrown, winding as at random among the oak trees. It is better to be knee-deep among the coppice grasses, which are dusting the ground with their seeds; or waist-high among the brake-fern. If there has been rain, the wood smells as good as it did in fritillary days. The more you walk thus, the

more distinct grows the smell of the plants you crush under foot or brush against. Here the brake-ferns smell: in some glade it is the marjoram's strong aroma: whilst everywhere the hazel leaf, when bruised, will refresh. Perhaps even the wild strawberry, on which the wood-pigeons feast all day, adds its mite to the large fragrance of the coppices.

Most of the birds of summer passage have ceased to sing. But in the high tops of the tall straight oaks in the coppice on the ridge you hear the shake of the wood-warbler, the scarcest and most beautiful of the three leaf-warblers that come here. For twenty years I have heard and seen the wood-warblers here, and have found, after waiting and watching, two or three of their domed nests among the brambles and dead leaves where the underwood is thin. One part of the wood, you might suppose, is just as well suited to the needs of this warbler as another, for there are oaks and caterpillar food and grassy, brambly glades for nesting quarters in all parts of it; yet here alone, where the oaks slope gently south, I find my slender yellow and olive wood-warblers. One June a strange thing happened to the song of several of these birds: instead of the usual distinct change in the shivering note of "chit, chit, chit, chitr" to "tr-tr-tr-tr-tre,"<sup>1</sup> there was the first passage bubbled out, the second

<sup>1</sup> This is Mr. Howard Saunders' rendering, and, so far as it is possible to syllable a bird's song, a good rendering, I think.



being omitted. To be sure that the song was a wood warbler's, I followed it up, and at length found and watched the birds hunting for food in the oaks, and now and again caressfully toying with each other. This was in the summer of 1902. Next year, I found a wood-wren's nest close to the fir walk. The wood-warblers, when their nests are nearly approached, utter a poignant note, as piercing as the redstart's or nightingale's, though not so needle-sharp as the cirlbuntings' that have lost their young. Hearing a wood-warbler utter this cry of concern in an oak close by, I stood and watched her. She flew down into a branch ten feet from the ground, and thence, with none of the shyness of many birds about to enter their nests, dropped straight to the ground among the dead leaves and grasses. This is the distinctive way in which the wood-warbler approaches and enters its nest. Therefore, I crept into the copse with a thrill of pleasure, to look at the second or third wood-warbler's nest I had ever found. A few steps off the path, and I met the bright eye of the bird. She sat in a nest of oak leaves and moss, flimsily built and half-roofed. The bed of dried bents and fine grasses held five beautiful pink-white eggs, freckled with dark red. How good for the health of the young birds, or the hatching of the eggs, is the sunshine, is shown by the position of many nests. The domed nests of the long-tailed titmouse and the wren,

the half-domed nests of the wood-warbler and willow-warbler, face south or west, any way rather than the sunless north. It is so too with the nest of the chiff-chaff. But sometimes the chiff-chaff will build a much better nest than either of the other leaf-warblers: in May there was one in the dell by the stream that its builder had quite roofed over, weaving together for the purpose dried sedge leaves. Why should the chiff-chaff often set her charming mousey nest a foot above the ground among the briars and the brambles, the wood-warbler and the willow-warbler always have theirs on the ground? A very trifling matter—and yet, if we knew the why, we might with it learn a vast deal of the obscure past of these, and with them all the race of birds—

“ Little flower—but *if* I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.”

July is the night-jar's month, if May is the nightingale's. On hot evenings, when not a leaf rustles against a leaf, the dead-still woods are the stiller through the strange bird's song. There never could be a sound more in harmony with the scene. The night-jar sings in tune with Nature. It is the same with the redbreast at the fall of the leaf, or with snipe bleating over the lone marsh land.

We are told of the systems, or accidents,

whereby fruits are sweet and flowers are bright and scented and birds sing finely, but how is it that no wise man yet has explained the beauty plan of Nature as it affects us? The light and shade on the running water, the sounds of the winds, the delicate beauty of the flowers, the black of the night, the songs and flight of birds—these and almost every other thing which makes appeal to our senses—are always in accord, in time, to the eye and ear: the sound is never out of harmony with the scene, the colours and forms of things are never ill-matched or disarranged. It has often been assumed that, by a certain disarray or sweet disorder, Nature makes the winning appeal to us. But some far more satisfying answer is wanted for this riddle of beauty.

On the clock of the summer night the first humming of the night-jar early in the month tells me that the hour is about a quarter to nine. Once I thought the night-jar was of the twilight only, in the evening, and again in the morning. The authors of the catalogue of the birds of Suffolk and Norfolk, in the Linnæan Society volumes, stated it as noteworthy that the bird was once seen feeding so late as ten o'clock at night. But often, on light nights, we hear the night-jar at all hours. The more you listen to this lullaby song, the less it is found to be a monotony. It rises and falls rhythmically in the still air. At the end of the hum or purr is a certain slow medley of broken sounds,

impossible to describe : so, I have heard at the end of the moorhen's night cry, when the bird has risen in flight, a faint quavering.

And July in the wood, as in the grass-grown lane that winds round its southern edge, is a month of moths too, on which the night-jar feasts largely. One kind quickly takes the place of another as July wanes. One week the moth among the scented white bed straw is the lovely twenty plume, feathered white or ash-gray, with beauty in detail as microscopic perhaps as that of the white and pink fleecy buckbean. Next week, though the fragile plume still flutters among the hedgerow plants, the mother-of-pearl is perhaps the moth of the moment. It has shot or shimmering colours on the wing, through which the old makers of ware might have thought of their cottage lustre, hoarded cups and pots of which are still handed down with the grandfather clocks from generation to generation. A third week may come in great numbers the yellow shell moth ; a fourth the magpie moth, after the yellow underwing, the most familiar of all. I have taken a magpie moth prisoner, and it has lain in my hand as dead. Fling it into the air, it lives and flies again in a moment. How long it will lie as dead I cannot say : my patience has been exhausted before the moth has moved. The fine silken thread by which many moths in the caterpillar period of life will lower themselves from one branch to another, or to the ground,

is another curious and beautiful device for escaping an enemy as well as for locomotion. Tap the web of a little community of caterpillars in a bush or plant, and in an instant several will lower themselves to the ground by their silken ladders, and hasten to shelter: and, though you do not touch the web again, one after another all the members of the community will lower themselves—there is no stopping the scare. But the ladder does not always save the tiny grubs in the oak or ash from the wood-warbler or the gold-crest. You may see both birds hover under a branch and take the dangling caterpillar in mid-air. A far finer moth than these appears at this time, the wood-leopard. After a storm I found one, heavy with eggs, lying helpless under the beech tree. The female is larger than the male, and scarcely less fine in dress. Her body is metallic blue-black, and her gray wings are spotted with the same deep colour: her head and thorax are coated with white down. I kept the moth for a day or two, and she laid a number of salmon-coloured eggs. These eggs, ordinarily, are glued to the bark of a tree. When the caterpillar has hatched, it bores its way into the bark, often beginning at a bud, and works along under a twig. From time to time it opens for sanitation a small round hole. Now, ichneumons that puncture the skin of the helpless caterpillar and lay therein an egg, which will wake to life and eat up the wretched grub, are not the only



freebooters. There are inquilines, "sponges" or cuckoo insects, which make no nests, but instead enter and use those of others: for instance, there are saw-flies which appropriate the gall-fly's nest, and gall-flies which appropriate the saw-fly's nest. In light of which, it seems significant that the caterpillar of the wood-leopard should seal up, with a silken web, the holes which it leaves behind it. Here may be provision as wise as that of the sphex herself, which paralyses, not kills, the prey she places and seals up with her egg, so that when the young sphex hatches it will have fresh meat to live upon.

From such glimpses into an amazing but perhaps sinister world of insects about us, it is pleasant to turn in thought to the yellow-hammer days. Hour after hour the yellow-hammer sits aloft on the hazel or oak twig in the coppice. His is the dwindling summer afternoon unshared in song with any other bird, till the redbreast begins again in earnest. It is in these very quiet days that the painted lady butterfly comes sometimes, long after the white admiral and purple emperor, hairstreak and fritillaries have gone: they are the fixed inhabitants of the wood, always appearing in July, though in such varying numbers. One summer it was the high-brown fritillary which swarmed: it hatched in time for two beds of sweet-williams in full bloom. The sight of many dozens of these lovely fritillaries settled on the flowers at the same time, or constantly

winging backwards and forwards between the coppice and the garden, could not be forgotten: the silver-washed fritillaries crowded on the bramble bushes on either side of the walk of spiring spruce firs were not choicer. But the painted lady is no regular dweller in the woods: she is a chance visitor, scarcely more. While the brimstone butterflies in September are storing themselves with sweet food against their winter trance, the painted ladies take little heed of flowers. With rare grace—with the grace of the white admiral itself—they float and soar among the hazel and oak stems, and settling on these, or on the ground in the glades, open and shut their wings in the sunshine. It seems as if the butterfly simply is exulting in the warmth of the day, athrill with the ecstasy of living. Nothing could look more like joy in the sun than this wing-play of butterflies. But we cannot be sure it is so. This may be an advertisement of butterfly beauty, intended to draw the attention of painted ladies of the opposite sex—the name painted lady includes both the male and female—as the peewit exhibition of the pairing season is believed to be. That the rage and rivalry of love are as fierce in the butterfly life as in the bird, no one doubts who has watched the battling of the fiery little coppers and the common blues in the meadow grasses; Iris, the emperor butterfly, no more bears with a rival, among birds, than does the ruff.

Butterfly travel has not the system and regularity of bird travel, but there are curious and wonderful features about it. Great insect rushes have often been noticed. Painted ladies have been seen crossing a country in a great host, all flying with fixity of aim in one direction. It must have been by some movement of the kind that the woods and gardens were peopled by these butterflies in 1903. Travels on this scale cannot be aimless. The butterfly itself—the imago—unless it should hibernate,<sup>1</sup> scarcely needs food: so that it is not failure in the butterfly harvest that forces the insect to set out on long travels: can it foresee some future failure in the caterpillar harvest? The gamma moth will cross the North Sea in vast swarms. The great, patient Gätke saw these rushes of the gamma, and of one of the usher moths, as well as of the scarce swallowtail butterfly (*podilarius*), from his observatory in Heligoland. Birds and insects often travel together—it is like the lion lying with the lamb. It is clear from what Gätke says that this day-flying gamma moves, in these bird and insect rushes, by night. The insect has nothing to fear from the bird during these travels. But the glare of the lighthouses is a deadly lure. Nobody has been able to tell why

<sup>1</sup> Formerly, seeing rather bleached specimens of the painted lady early in the summer, I believed that it hibernated: but I now think it far likelier that these were visitors from the Continent, as also the palish specimens of edusa, the clouded yellow, seen sometimes in June in England.

so many animals are lured by the light. The fire of an engine at its highest speed will magnetise the bird sometimes. A driver gave me this strange experience. Looking over the express engine after a fifty miles run, he noticed a wryneck sitting between the spokes of one of the driving wheels. He stooped and stretched out his hand to take it from the wheel, when it fluttered out and along the ground for a few yards; then it moved its head round, in the odd manner of a wryneck, as though it were on a swivel. The poor bird was maimed, so the engine-driver with mercy put it out of pain. How it had kept its position when the engine was slowing down, the driver never could imagine: with the engine moving at full speed, it would be a different matter. On another occasion my friend was firing to a main line goods engine, which was running at about twenty miles an hour, when a song thrush flew on to the foot-plate—the door of the fire-box was partly open, and apparently its fierce light had drawn the bird. It dashed about for several seconds, and had narrow escapes before the driver and his assistant could catch it. They took it off the engine at the next stopping-place, and set it under a bush to await the day.

Whether the bat, like the bird, is fascinated by strong light, I do not know, but one night I found that I had been unconsciously aiding the long-eared bat in the pursuit of its prey. I had

been sitting on one or two dark evenings by the window, with a strong light to read by. There was no blind or curtain across the glass, so that many moths were drawn to the light. One night I noticed a bat flying across the window several times. Next night it came again, and then I found out the attraction. Many ermine moths, with soft creamy wings spotted with black, were fluttering about, and the bat would come and seize them even as they brushed against the glass. After this the window was covered at dusk.

The more one knows the woods, the more conscious one will grow of their gracious silence, always deepening and deepening as the summer fades. One is intensely aware of it in those evenings when the night-jars are whirring everywhere. I could never shape into words or thoughts what I felt about the hush of the woods. The large, vague joy of it eludes description. It smoothes over the rough places of the mind. The depth of it can only be plumbed by the sounds that accentuate it; by the night-jars in July—when they have ceased, only by the zizz of the cricket, or the shrill of the bat. Standing in the garden, five hundred feet above the sea level, the lone woods all around, one sometimes can hear after many minutes of utter hush—the dusty grass heads never stirring—voices of folk speaking in the village, perhaps a mile and a half away as a crow flies, and a



hundred or a hundred and fifty feet lower. There is fully a mile of dense oak and hazel woods between, but the sounds travel over these without hindrance. Once, on a summer night, we could distinguish fragments of what the people sang or cried out, it being an exciting election time. Even on mornings at this season, which are never quite so hushed as the evenings, we can often hear the guns booming from the forts or war-ships thirty or forty miles away. The rush of air on the high downs gives tone to nerves and heart, and fits us afresh for the fight: the sun is the sparkle of life and the sea its salt. We want them each and all. The effect of this deep hush in lonely places is to relax, not to brace: but this, too, is entirely good for us—all care lulled and calculation forgot.

Not here, where the pheasants are few and wild, but in woods and spinneys among the hills on the other side of the valley, the hush of sombre November afternoons is turned into an uproar for half-an-hour. There a gamekeeper is a high-priest in a land of sacred birds, the watchers his acolytes. Just before dusk, the pheasants, cocketing loud, go to roost, and, where they are thickest, it seems from the sounds as if every tree has its bird or two. It takes long for an alien bird to suit an English scene; I have no sympathy with attempts to give England a flashy fauna. It is like the rhododendron wood. These things have no history and no association in English wild

nature. But the Reeves pheasant will some day, I hope, become an English bird. I should value it in wild woody places, not so much for splendid appearance on the wing, or beauty of plumage, as for the loud, strange cry it utters as it goes up to its roosting trees. It is finer in this, more forest wild in sound, than our own bird ; and these vespers of the birds and beasts are delightful to hear. Every wild sound when the monochrome is beginning, and the spirit of the dark settling on the earth, is worth listening to ; and the movements, too, of animals at this hour, in flocks or singly—some preparing for rest, others for action—are curious to watch. An extreme wariness is now to be noticed among some creatures. Great flocks of ring-doves, old birds with young of the year, nest in the spruce firs or in the oaks near by, on one side or the other of the avenue, according to where the wind sits. But, before the birds fly into the spruce firs, they will settle, when in a large party, on the bare oaks. Fifty perhaps will be clustered thickly on one oak, and here they wait for ten minutes or more before venturing to drop, singly or in small parties, into the firs for the night. It is a cautious preliminary to roosting. I feel sure, after watching such parties for many years, that there is among them no sentinel system. But several members of the party, over which drowsiness is gradually stealing, are sure to be alert and suspicious of the least sound in the underwoods beneath. A solitary

wood-pigeon, or a pair of birds in a bare oak, would be very hard to approach on a still afternoon. But the flock has many eyes which sweep the underwoods in all directions. Hence the wood-pigeon is never more sensitive to danger than in these few minutes before dusk, and practically it cannot be stalked by the gunner. He may lie flat and draw himself along by inches, but a twig snaps, or the dead leaves rustle, and there is a loud clap of gray wings—the flock is up and away. The danger signal is, no doubt, given unconsciously by the first bird that hears or sees something of the stalker: it is not meant as a warning to the party. The instinct of the bird that starts first is simply self-preservation: but the effect is the same as if the pigeons were to post sentinels, and the sentinels were to give a sign. True, here and there, a flock includes two or three birds, which, though slightly alarmed by the flight of their companions in a body, will themselves wait in the oak a few seconds longer. These may be old birds nerved against false alarms, or young birds whose sense of danger is not yet fully developed. But the birds that stay a little after their companions have left in fear and confusion may be less wary or fearful through many obscure and insignificant causes. Individuals in the bird world, as among men, differ widely from each other: we need not watch flocks long to feel sure of this.

The wood-pigeons may prefer the spruce firs

on winter nights for the hiding which these trees afford them. Yet I am not convinced that the warmth is not a motive too. From night winds that reach them in the oaks they seek shelter: they will constantly change their quarters as the wind changes, seeking those trees which are least exposed. The discomfort of the ruffling wind rather than its cold may account for this changing of the roosting-place. But I cannot agree with the view taken by some naturalists that all English birds are proof against cold — through their skin being non-conductors of heat — when I see the way in which wrens, titmice, and others keep together on bitter winter nights. There is only one explanation why the wren or the magpie clusters or swarms — the wish for warmth. A bird that by itself was proof against cold would not be likely to choose a warm hole and cluster therein, as the wrens do, dozens together; moreover, the wrens are not flocking birds at other times. After cruel night frosts early in the spring, I have found song thrushes dead and frozen in their nests; though this is not such strong evidence that birds suffer from cold as is the wren swarm, for during these spring frosts food is scarce, and the starved song thrushes may have perished in the night through weakness.

The dead song thrushes on their nests I found in bare hedgerows among the open fields. It is strange how seldom we find dead creatures in the wood where lives innumerable must every

year be yielded up. A little heap of feathers, which marks the place where a sparrow-hawk has struck down a pigeon or a smaller bird, a rabbit with the cruel scientific wound at the back of the neck, sometimes a frail, beautiful warbler on an April morning, amongst the hazels, where it has dropped from its perch at night—these, and they are not seen every day, are the only dead creatures we find in the open glades or in the thickets. The wood hides its sorrowful dead: it is a swift sexton. Not only the place of death, but the nature of it, are obscure. I have heard of the theory that death comes to the wild bird or beast in no malign form, but I fear there is little to prove it. The hunted rabbit, fear of the stoat blazing in its eyes, the chattering, fleeing bird stricken by the sparrow-hawk—I cannot understand how the throes and terror of death can be absent here. With death from cold, starvation, or disease, it may be otherwise. When the sick and dying animal creeps to a hole or dark place, it may be shrinking instinctively from its kind—for animals will often attack the ailing and deformed—and its end may be painless. But then, human beings too, in pain and misery, prefer the quiet and dark. The act of lower animal death may often be painless, but not so the dark passages that lead to it. All we can feel sure of is that the bird and beast are spared those pains which are born of the consciousness of failing powers, and of



life drawing stern to a close—the Divine privilege and penalty which go with the reasoning mind. To this extent only we can take it for sure that the end is merciful with the bird and beast, euthanasia.

No day spent in the wood ever failed me. It is only when I have been struggling to recall and write down a few things seen and felt there that I know failure. Forgetting how vainly I had tried before, I came to the task with enthusiasm, and believed that it would be possible to bring to the page something of the bloom of the fritillary days and the balm of the night-jar dusk. Try to word-paint minutely, you put in too much, breaking Schiller's great rule of art: take only a few simple, familiar features, the blackbird's song, the brake-fern unfolding, the April larches in the mist of green, and you feel you have left out the best. So that we cannot tell the secrets even of the things which we have seen over and over again, each time with added joy. And, even could we, these things were but disconnected fragments.



## CHAPTER VII

### HILLS OF GOD

ONE way to the downs is up the most beautiful by-road in the world. It! branches off the highway at the leafy hollow, near where the chalk stream wells up through the first grasses. I pass the church and the ancient manor-house, and mount a rough flint road avenued by elms. The trees end a little way from the hamlet, and then begin great straggling hedgerows that have hardly been trimmed for a generation past. They bear brave burthens of traveller's joy, and linnets almost in flocks nest here in May and June. Nightingales build among the dog-mercury and nettles under the hedgerow that faces south :

chiff-chaffs, willow-wrens, garden-warblers, and blackcaps are here; bullfinches, greenfinches, goldfinches; wrens, where the ivied bank steepens; meadow pipits in the grasses close to the hedge; shrikes among the thorn bushes. Eight miles on, deep down at the foot of the hills, in the fertile land beyond, lies the market-town with its stern Norman church. But only rarely can folk on this side want to visit the town, which is miles from the nearest railway. Often the grass grows on the road in summer, and scarcely a cart in a day goes up or comes down this winding road. Between the hamlet in the hollow and the town, lie a few poor cottages and two lonely homesteads. The road belongs to the past: nobody has much need of it to-day for traffic; so that one can lie by the hour on the turf under the hedge and not be vexed by an intruder. Perhaps in a long summer afternoon no one will pass save a farm labourer with his unyoked, patient team, slow-clanking in their heavy harness; and these, like the wattle hurdler in the wood, or the shepherd on the lonely down, are parcel of the scene; they never intrude.

The deep wood draws us at every season. Perhaps for those who have lovingly grown into such scenes, the way to the bare hills, too, has its beauty and allurements for each day in the year. But I never planted myself there. I am only a sojourner now and then in the glory of summer, and if I went in the leafless times,

there might be a sense of failure. Of course, in winter, there must be many wonderful skies and horizons among the hills that form the ridge. Snow sunsets and hail rainbows are nowhere finer than among these great downs. In March, after a stinging hailstorm, one may see the bow bended to its uttermost, clear-cut from earth to earth, the colours for half a minute distinct, arranged in precise, even bands. Sometimes you have a strong image of the bow, and a fainter image again of that. At the same time of year, I have looked to the hills and seen a sunset of glory, foretelling snow. A long streak of leaden cloud, shapen as a spear head, blotted the coppery orb; but the fierce light aglow behind could not be shut out: it beat up and gave an edging to the whole upper rim of the dark cloud curtain, in outline like forked lightning, but lustrous white instead of scintillating blue. Northward, hard by this streak with its jagged edge, a cloud less heavily weighted, in colour pure azure, floated on a luminous sky. I have watched many sunsets from the garden in summer, but I can recall no more beautiful combination of colours and glows than this. So unmistakably azure was the colour of the cloud lying on its white bed, that I could look through the group of crowded pines, and still be sure of its exact hue.

These splendours notwithstanding, the days for the downs, and for the lonely way that winds into them, seem to me to be in the thymy



*"His unyoked, patient team."*





midsummer. I would always choose days when cirrus floated ice-high, or massy cumulus ensured me many hours of the fairest weather. From where the avenue by the hamlet ends to the top of the great ridge, June till September, are great glows of colour in the large fields and about the hollows and sides of the downs. This is where the charcoal is suffered to make a fragrant field of cloth of gold; another field is sainfoin rose; a third blood-red with its clover; a fourth blazes with poppies. In July the hedgerows are studded with dog-roses and with sweet-brier pink as the campion. At dusk large disks of elder bloom light the hedgerows, smelling as wholesome as any flower that grows. Perhaps it was relaxing in the valley beneath. The splendid air of the downs gives tone to mind and body. I always feel that I must lie for an hour or two on the springy turf, looking up into the great deeps, and at fleecy, curled cirrus; crushing in my palm the strong-scented thyme which shares the whole ridge with the yellow and red-tipped bird's-foot trefoil. The lonelier the place, the greater the intimacy and understanding between men and Nature. But, really, there is no day loneliness, in the deterrent sense of the word, about the vast billowy downs of summer. The lark in the blue, the bee in the thyme—listening to these, taking our brimful of the hot sun tempered by the breeze, we cannot be lonely. It is very different when the sun has gone under the hill,

the wind dropped, and the earth grown grave. Then it is solemn on the downs, sinister to some. It is worth waiting for, that neutral period between the light and night, just to see the sun, clear of cloud, rest upon and dip under the horizon. I have seen the purple of the down north-west turned to red for a few seconds then, a sight never to be forgotten. Once the rim of the sun has touched the sharp edge of the down, it goes so quickly out of sight that you think you can see it moving.

At the highest point in the downs hereabouts you can see, through a perfectly clear atmosphere, into five or six shires, and quite forty miles in one direction. I have seen the White Horse Hill loom on the horizon, but here is a gully, as sunless as the great Horse's own manger, where the chalk rears an abrupt wall and ends. A few miles away over the brown heath is one of the battle-grounds of Royalist and Puritan. There are fields more immediately decisive than this, but scarcely one in England where the chief figure is of such enduring attraction. Ineffectual to stay or decide the strife was the part he played that day, as indeed were his influence and counsel from the outset of the war: but not ineffectual afterwards, seeing what he left to a country's treasury of mind and character. Within a day's walk of each other, are the spots where Falkland and Hampden fell. Falkland had soon learnt how superficial was the view he had taken at Edgehill,

when he thought that a charge driven home would end the strife. On the morning of his death, he knew that the fire had flamed too high to be stamped out. The most careless of his own life, and yet the least among the fighters on this day, he dressed himself fastidiously, "as one who had leisure to think of the seemliness of his attire, because he alone in all those hosts had set his mind on something else than the winning of victory." Falkland spurred at the hedge gap, through which the musquetiers' bullets were pouring. Rider and horse went down in instant death. A little way to the south of the spot where Falkland fell is the heath where Rupert, with the flower of English chivalry and breeding, thundered vainly at the ranks of a crude body of amateur fighters. There is nothing strange in Falkland's failure: sweetness of reason never availed against elemental force in times of paroxysm. But it is amazing when men raw and unpractised in the art of war withstand shock on shock of fiery horsemen, many of these soldiers by instinct and profession, such as Rupert hurled at the London volunteers that day. "They behaved themselves," said Clarendon, "to wonder": "for, give them their due," said Digby, "they shewed themselves like good men." What a scene on the heath—the sober-clothed, rather sanctimonious, middle-class Londoners thwarting with their hedges of pikes the onsets of the cavalier full of high scorn and

exquisite in grace! It decided this field, and in it one sees clear the germs of so much that made the English the people which they are to-day. The splendid cavalier brings the colour into the picture: the stubborn London trained bands—knowing “no service beyond the easy practice of their postures in the artillery garden”—are of its very canvas. There never was a withstand more significant of what was to follow in the life of a country.

Hardly a mile of England but has been the scene of English history-making in peace or in war. It is hard not to be moved by such memorials: sometimes these are not without power to increase for us the glamour of the earth. They themselves have come to be of the earth earthy. Especially is this so with those very dim memorials of the ancient men that dug the trench and piled the mound about the tops of these bare or woody hillsides. In some spots the ground is scarred by the worn but still distinct lines of the camps or settlements of a people who must have wrought largely with stone, and dotted by their graves or barrows. In these hills one need not search very long or closely to find a few of the flint tools or the fragments of bones which mark the abodes of those who were here a thousand years and more before the Roman came. We dig a little in the side of a barrow in the woods, and it yields fragments of Roman pottery: deeper down would lie the bones, if



they were preserved by burning, and the food vessels of a far older period, when bronze work was perhaps in its infancy. Pry into one of the longer barrows, which are found among the downs, and you may find the skulls—the dark hair still intact—of men who worked with wood and flaked stones. With these tools, not more than a few inches in length, it is thought that the earth walls and ditches of the great camps on the hills were largely made. Many of these relics of the unstoried men lie at the face of the land, or at most a few inches under the grass and soil. Deeper and harder to find are the still rougher stone tools of the wanderer of a far earlier time. His successors sowed seeds, even weaved and spun: they wrought after a while in bronze, as well as in the stone which they knew how to polish, and grind, and chip—those at least of them who lie in rounded barrows: they had domestic cattle around them, as the bones of an ox, the Celtic shorthorn, that often lie about their pits and their graves, prove: they had the potter's thumb: they often cremated their dead: they worshipped. But that older man we do not seek to-day among the camps and barrows. He has perished tone and tint, save for the stone implements which are found in the gravel: this is the drift man, as he has been called, a nomad hunter, coeval with the mammoth—whose teeth have been found in the gravel drifts alongside his flint implements—and with the elephant

and sabre-toothed tiger. One adze-like flint implement, unpolished and very roughly flaked, which I found in the wood at the surface, has been thought to belong to his time—when the plastic earth was still in the forming, and the face of the downs being smoothed by the ice-beds moving north; a smoothness which impresses on one, more than any rough and jagged rocks, the sense of immeasurable age; of very slow making.

The most ancient human relics of all are bedded in the gravel drift below rather than on the summit and sides of the noble downs. But it is the ridge of downs that touches us surer with thoughts of long-past races in our country struggling up to a rude civilisation. First, the people, whose charred bones are found in the long barrows, stone men pure and simple, the earliest, it may be, of all adventurers into England: then the Gael, the first of the Celts, bringing to these hills the higher civilisation implied by bronze, changing the long for the round barrow, driving the Iberian stone man into remote corners: next the Brython, bringing the art of iron: then history, and with it Roman, and Teuton, and Dane. Stone man, Celt, and Roman, each has graved deeply his mark on these downs; the long barrow, the round barrow, the flint tools, some rough, others polished, the simple pottery, the bones of men and of cattle, the great camps of Iberian or of Celt, the smaller ones of Roman Legion, the adamantine Roman roads—all are here,

scattered along the range. The range is a palimpsest written on, in characters that baffle and that fascinate us, by people after people. It is true so little is written plain that the reader may sometimes be inclined to turn away in disappointment, feeling that he can never know anything certain about these people and their ways of life. But this is true, too, of every problem of life worth solving. We are strangers even in the land and among the people we are most familiar with and care for most. There are not the means, above all not the time to solve anything. Some have not even the means and the time to find out how beautiful and wonderful the earth is, and how worth while it would be to live many times over.

How did the people who fortified themselves on the summits of these high places find water for themselves and their cattle, in the droughts of summer? It is clear that they must sometimes have lived in large parties on the hill-tops for a while. The camps or fortified places were not made for a day: the labour was far too heavy for this. Perhaps the inhabitants of a whole district here gathered together and held out against an enemy established on some neighbouring height. On one hill are the remains of an undoubted Roman camp: on another, a few miles distant, the deep outline of a far larger camp than any made by Roman Legion. This camp must have held many hundreds of men at

times. In the valleys about, water was more abundant than it is to-day. The river springs burst out higher up these valleys than they do to-day; for the land was grandly wooded then, and the rainfall larger. But the water cannot have been brought up in quantity from the valleys to the camps on the summits of the downs. The dew-ponds, which are to-day to be seen on the hills, not always dry in the driest summers, may have supplied these people with water. Puddled with clay, and stored at the start with snow, a dew-pond will attract and condense mists and clouds through the year, and hold water at seasons when the bed of every winter-bourne in the valleys below is dry. There is moisture in the air in nights and mornings when the earth seems parched. Rain has not fallen for weeks perhaps, and yet on a summer morning I have found the earth around some of the trees quite wet. Many trees in these spots are alembics, but the dew-pond is a surer gatherer and condenser of moisture about the high downs than any tree. So that perhaps the dew-ponds, where the shepherd drives his sheep to-day, watered the Briton or Gael in his stockaded fort. The knowledge of how to get water on the highest downs by such simple means is of the kind that a rude people might well win.

The thyme, in places with the basil thyme, and almost everywhere with the exquisite mill mountain of the tiny fairy white bells, is the

flower of the downs. But this is the home of orchids too. On the great slope beneath the beeches there are clusters of the faint-coloured fragrant orchids that in the evening smell like carnations. The pyramidal orchids grow on the same slope: their lovely spikes of rose flowers smell like honey. The fragrant and the pyramidal orchids are soon found on a day in mid-summer, but the fly, and the frog, and the bee orchids have a way of dying out in places where they are for a time plentiful. They may be furnished with the most wonderful machinery for perfecting an immense number of seeds. But suppose some disaster destroys an orchid's "marriage priests" in a district. Butterflies, from causes obscure to us, will suddenly disappear from a place where they have long been abundant; or reappear in large numbers in a place where they have been scarce for many years. The Duke of Burgundy fritillary<sup>1</sup> occurs to me as one of the latter. Moths, which marry the orchids, little doubt are subject to the same vicissitudes. So the fly and the frog orchids which once grew on the thymy down at home, and with them the pyramidal, may have perished through want of cross fertilisers. I rarely go

<sup>1</sup> It is not a fritillary, and its name is absurd. But the Latin name is not more inviting. Might we not have a re-naming of some of our English butterflies, such as this and the two pearl-bordered fritillaries? One of the pearl-bordered fritillaries is called Selene—the goddess of the moon! The peacock, the red admiral, the marbled-white, and the painted lady are among the happily named butterflies.



up this lonely road into the downs without thinking a little of some of the problems of bird, or flower, or butterfly; the wherefore, the whither, and the whence—the Perhaps. In these places, the remote hillsides, the great rough fields, the roadside, with broad belt of turf and tangle teeming all the summer with wild life, all things are so centred on themselves, so unconnected with human life, that we are the more induced for a short while to consider them apart from ourselves. This is the objective attitude towards Nature. I do not think for a moment that it is the better way. The greater business is to recognise what is beautiful, to enjoy it to our uttermost capacity, and to strive to make others so see and enjoy it. The more often, the more completely, we achieve this, the nearer we reach up to an ideal life for man: that is to say, ideal life in one great branch: it would be monstrous to pretend that this is the only branch, that love of home and patriotism and duty to others in worldly matters can rightly be let slide. There is no antagonism between these things—to love Nature and be steeped in her is not to go into a moral wilderness.

The subjective way towards Nature, the way of feeling, is, I believe, the happier, but few who watch wild life closely and long feel no curiosity as to how habit and appearance have come about, and what their purposes may be. Returning home from the downs one June day, and searching in vain, as hitherto I always have searched, for the

larder in the thorns, where the butcher bird is said to store its food, I saw a cuckoo examining the hedgerow. This bird was seeking a nest in which to place one of its own eggs: it was mobbed by several birds, especially by an angry blackbird which shouted and flew at it more than once. I left the road and stood in the rough clover field, hoping to see the result. Suddenly two partridges, which I had not seen before, sprang up with a loud startling whir, almost at my feet, though I had stood quite still for upwards of a minute, watching the cuckoo and its pursuers. They flew a dozen yards, dropped and half-shuffled, half-fluttered, along the ground with cries of distress. I knew the device, and looking down saw, what I expected, several partridge chicks freshly hatched. Fragments of shell lay a few inches off, and I was instantly struck by the general resemblance of the chick to its own egg-shell. Roughly, no doubt the partridge, young and old, does in colour often resemble its environment: certainly it is not in contrast with environment. But the resemblance between chick and egg-shell is much more remarkable. It is the same with the young peewit and egg-shell, and perhaps with other of these precocious chicks born on the open ground. What is the meaning of this close assimilation of the chick just hatched to its chipped shell?—for it is so striking that when you see it thus you instantly ask for an explanation. Assuming

that the partridge egg-shells are effectively protected from sharp-eyed creatures of prey, through their passable resemblance in colour to their environment, it is easy to imagine that the young, newly hatched, ought to be very like the egg-shell: if they are in contrast with the other shells, which are chipping perhaps, but out of which the chicks have not yet come, the whole brood may be detected by a hawk or other animal of prey, and pay the penalty. Only *is* it the colour of the partridge chick and the shell which preserves them from the animal of prey? It is this we cannot feel sure of, until we have watched a very great number of cases. What often seems a weak point about the theory—which most of us hold more or less—of wild creatures being protected by colour or marking from their enemies, is our assumption that the enemy's eye is deluded as easily as our own. Animals that hunt their prey by eye must have a vision, in regard to colour and marking, form and movement, compared with which ours is clumsy and abortive. Think of the keenness of eye that is the wind-hover's: once he is quivering over the spot, rick or open field, where the mouse is exposed, no colour, no stillness, will deceive him.

On the whole, among wild creatures in our own country, it seems as if there were some general rule or plan that there should be nothing like a striking contrast with environment. A very large number of illustrations of this, many

passably good or enough for the purpose, a less number remarkable, and some extraordinary, can always be found. The wren in the hedge bottom, in winter especially, is a fair illustration: the hare in the ploughed field or fallow, the red-brown aphides on red-brown tender leaves, the vivid green aphides and caterpillars on vivid green leaves, are others. But are the caterpillars and aphides really protected by the harmonising of their colours with the colours of the leaves on which they sit or crawl? The individual certainly not, but the species or type yes, is the answer we make when we are arguing that these colours and markings afford protection and have gradually come about by Nature selecting and preserving in the course of the ages those individuals which are best coloured and marked. It is true, we admit, that the hawk sees the mouse, and that the wood-warbler sees the green caterpillar on the green oak leaf. Yet the colour and marks which match environment, in the long run, do make a difference, and this difference saves the type. If the individual were not matched with its environment, it would fall a prey still more easily, and then the type would often die out. But there are animals which in colour and marking do not conform to the general rule and yet flourish. We have found a theory to account for the preservation of certain caterpillars, and perhaps butterflies too, which are brilliantly coloured: these insects are not good to eat, and their bright


colours act as flags of warning to creatures that would otherwise prey on them.<sup>1</sup> But take the cock blackbird. He does not come under this theory: he is in marked contrast with his environment. Yet on the whole he flourishes as much as the song thrush, which is more or less protectively coloured. It may be that the blackbird makes up the deficiency in regard to colour protection by alertness, constant suspicion of danger: he does to me seem a trifle more apprehensive of enemies than the song thrush whilst feeding—though it cannot be more than a trifle—and his rattling, fussy note at dusk, before he goes to roost, may be a danger note. But the evidence here is vague, and not at all convincing. We have to face the fact that the blackbird, which does not in the least resemble his environment during the light, and is quite as subject to enemies as the thrush, is not known to fall a victim more often than the protectively coloured members of the family.

In the spinneys and thick hedgerows on either side of the road that leads up to the downs, four birds build nests which are almost perfectly matched with their environment. Those long-tailed titmice, which build in woods where there are not blackthorns, whitethorns, or evergreens

<sup>1</sup> Many caterpillars, inconspicuous in their earlier stages, take on brilliant colours at their last moult; others start with brilliant colours and end with sober ones. Nobody has explained these changes.



to their liking, often set their nests between the large forks of ash trees. Such nests, outwardly covered with light gray lichens which grow on the ash trees, are so exceedingly like their environment that it is almost impossible to find one except by watching the birds at work. The missel-thrush's nest, also built in ashes or oak before the leaf affords shelter, often matches closely, through its outside lining of lichens, the limbs of the tree between the forks of which it is placed, though here the deception is not quite so good or so invariable as that of the long-tailed titmouse. The nightingale generally builds quite on the ground. Often I have found the nest set among the stems of the oak or hazel underwoods, with no other cover of any kind than these few bare sticks afford. Yet the nests are hard to find. It has taken me days to find two or three in small spinneys quite bare of undergrowth, though I have searched with the full confidence that the nests must be there, on an acre or so of land. These nests are made of the dead leaves of oak and hazel, pliable through having lain rotting in the wood for a year or two, with a few leaves of the maple underwood. The nest matches its environment, so do the beautiful eggs, and the parent bird when she is sitting, and the young birds when they are feathered and almost ready to fly. Last, there is the case of those wrens which form the outside of their nest entirely of



bits of dead brake-fern, and attach it to masses of dead brake-fern which have not been broken up by snow and storm during the past winter. I have taken note of these four cases for many years now, and it seems to me that there are few better illustrations of the matching of environment than those of wren's nest and brake-fern, long-tailed titmouse's and lichenized ash tree. The case of the long-tailed titmouse appealed to me when I was a small boy and had never heard of, much less thought about, this theory of protection. But though I am always struck by the harmony of these nests with their surroundings, whenever I see them, I am not convinced that they are the result of any process of selection. In each case the material by which the harmony is achieved by the builder lies ready at hand: the lichens, which the titmouse and missel-thrush use, are within reach of their beaks even when they are standing by or on their nests: it is the same with the leaves which the nightingale uses, and with the fern for the wren's nest. Each of these materials, apart from protective purposes, serves well in nest building. The lichens may be meant as ornaments, for the æsthetic tastes of birds are undoubted, but I am inclined to think they are chosen for their binding or adhesive power.

The broad belt of waste by the road to the downs is one of those grassy, flowery spots which many butterflies haunt by day and moths at dusk.

There are patches of very fine eyebright, and of the pretty meadow saxifrage—telling perhaps of gravel drift below—knautia, knapweed, and the splendid black mullein, and the exquisite, frail harebell. Meadow-browns, whites and orange-tips, tortoise-shells, red admirals and grayling butterflies, are here in their various seasons. I see in such spots no remarkable resemblance of the grayling to its environment. But in August, in the pine woods far away on the horizon, I was struck by the way this sober-clad butterfly matched the ground littered with gray fir cones, about which it flew and settled. Here the resemblance was between the upper side of the butterfly's wings and its environment. This among English butterflies is uncommon. It is the under sides of the wings of butterflies which far more often match surroundings. A firm believer in the protection afforded to butterflies and moths by colour and marking has given me some curious examples. When the orange-tip is at rest on its favourite composite flowers, who, he asks, can detect it? It has certainly a pattern worked in green on the under sides of its wings of a plant-like character. In a lane near Diss, he once found several brown hairstreaks, a rare butterfly which I have only met with once in my life. Whenever one of these butterflies settled, he lost sight of it till it rose again, so closely did it resemble its surroundings. The green hair-streak, its wings closed, is green as the leaf on

which it sits. But I have not been struck by any marked resemblance of the far commoner purple hairstreak of our oak woods to its surroundings, though it is certainly not in contrast with them when its wings are shut.

I admit all these cases of butterfly harmony with environment, and there are many others quite as remarkable. Unless we accept protection as their origin, it is impossible to account for them, any more than for the colour of the nightingale and her eggs, the partridge and the peewit chicks.<sup>1</sup> Yet I should like to have clearer proof that the butterfly needs protection in this particular form. In flight, most English butterflies are conspicuous, and in no wise match their surroundings: yet then they are rarely attacked successfully by birds. Only the most expert birds, as flycatchers or swallows, deal easily with butterflies on the wing. House sparrows and finches, and various insect-eating birds, may make a few spasmodic assaults on a white butterfly or a red admiral: they commonly fail. But I have often noticed butterflies with a small bit from each wing, upper or lower, missing. The gaps caused by these missing bits of wing are opposite each other: the explanation is that some bird,

<sup>1</sup> In the case of the *nest* of the nightingale, and also of the brake-fern and lichen-spangled nests of missel-thrush and long-tailed titmouse, there is, as we have seen, an alternative explanation; namely, that the protectively coloured material happens to be very close at hand and quite serviceable for nest-building. So also with the wren.

meeting with the butterfly as it rested, its wings closed up, took a nip at it. This does show that butterflies at rest are subject to the attacks of birds, but it is the wings of the insect which are chiefly exposed, and it seems as if the size and arrangement of these wings are a more effectual protection for the butterfly than colour or marking. I am also inclined to think that of greater importance to the little green caterpillar of the June oaks than its colour is its way of escaping by a fine silken ladder by which it can lower itself from branch to branch on to the ground. I have tapped a web in a plant—the common ragwort or St. James' wort, I think—on which a number of caterpillars were living; and caterpillar after caterpillar lowered itself hastily to the ground and hurried away to cover. This way of escape must save innumerable caterpillars from the sharpest-sighted birds which perhaps no colour assimilation might deceive. Again, as regards the nesting pheasant or partridge: whether resemblance to their surroundings protect them or not from feathered enemies, such as hawks and crows, I think it likely that absence of scent would protect them more effectually from various four-footed creatures of prey; and there does seem to be a beautiful provision of Nature by which the mother sitting on her eggs or brooding over her young is without the scent which might betray her nest to enemies that hunt largely by nose. Why birds such as



pheasants, woodcocks, and landrails, are ever scented is a mystery. What service can it be to them?

English moths, in their winged or imago state, are, I believe, more subject to the attacks of creatures of prey than are English butterflies in the same state. (In the chrysalid and caterpillar states both are preyed on largely by very many kinds of enemies.) Resting by day with their wings spread out flat, they are, when discovered, very open to attack in their bodies. The upper sides of their wings match their environment, frequently the tree trunk on which they rest. Mr. Mace has reminded me, for instance, of the "underwing" family of moths, which at rest fold their soberly coloured upper wings over their handsome barred yellow and black under wings, so that the practised eye of an entomologist has difficulty in detecting them. When feeding on the mixture of beer or rum and treacle prepared for them by the insect hunter, these moths, like many others I have noticed, will vibrate their wings intensely, as in a kind of ecstasy, and in doing so disclose their strongly marked under wings; and even at dusk the difference in colour and marking between the two sets of wings is then remarkable. It is quite as remarkable in the case of a larger and more beautiful moth, the red underwing. When flying in the daytime, it is most noticeable from the brilliant red and black of the upper sides of the

two lower wings. Seeing one flying on a sunny August day, I thought for the moment that it was a butterfly new to England. It settled on a shady spot on a wall, put its gay colours from sight, and was at once unremarkable.

If then the brilliant colours and patterns, sometimes of fantastic beauty, are to attract the female, whilst the sober or assimilating colours and marks are to cheat the enemy, how doubly, how dextrously is the butterfly armed in the fight! The upper for love and the under for life. Only, the compromise or balance between sexual and natural selection is perhaps very delicate. Once yield too much to one demand, there will be too little for the other, and the compromise is at an end: in such a case, the butterfly is in danger of dying out: the family of butterflies known as *Vanessæ*, say some, are doomed, having too much splendour, too little protection.

It is impossible to see these cases of harmony with environment, even in English woods and fields, where they are by no means remarkable as compared with those of some foreign lands, and to cast one's mind over the matter, without feeling that Nature has some great colour and form plan by which life is fostered. So large is the number of these cases of harmony which a field naturalist can recall, that he may be tempted to lay it down as a general proposition that Nature abhors a contrast. But we cannot all allow ourselves the luxury of conviction down

to each detail. In the study, by the book, a man may reason his road to complete belief more easily than by trusting to his eyes and powers of observation in the field, where many doubts will suggest themselves. In the open air one is constantly seeing things which need to be cleared up before one can accept to the full these engaging theories. One day I read that wind-fertilised flowers were inconspicuous in colour, as they had no need to attract the notice of insects which carry the pollen from blossom to blossom: and a day or two later I was struck by the brilliant red female flowers of the hazel, which is fertilised by the winds. It is said that the white rings and markings about the tails of various animals are protective in origin and object; that in flight they serve as danger signals. But, watching the rabbits in flight, I never can feel sure that the white tail might not on the whole help the pursuer rather than baulk him of prey. Once embrace the theory with enthusiasm, yield up oneself to it without reserve, all the parts of the puzzle come together. Everything is pressed into the service of making sureness more sure: has the caterpillar brilliant and conspicuous colours?—even these are protective, flags of warning which deter creatures of prey from attack. This is the short cut to faith, but is it the safe way to truth?



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GARDEN

A GARDEN to me seems of value almost in proportion as the owner tills or tends it himself. Coming home late on a spring evening, I have just discerned and not more in the fast thickening light a cottage neighbour at work on his plot of ground by the wayside. The heart will always go out to the bent figure of a worker at the earth at an hour when work a-field, with few exceptions, has ended. True, one is in the vein to be moved, the earth being of such glorious beauty at this time which wavers between light and night. Every figure now takes to itself some portion of this beauty, bitten-out far off against what light remains on the horizon, or, if near at hand, in deeper shade than the darkling world about. No

one has ever been able to shape into thoughts the perfectly familiar and yet ever mysterious feelings of awe and delight which strike through him at this wonderful hour. Hence perhaps some of the pathos and heroism which I find in this bent figure of a poor man on his potato patch. But not all. This man had been at work in the fields for the hirer from near daybreak till five o'clock. He trudged home, had his tea and bread and butter, and was out again to labour at the earth. There are other ways of spending the hour or so that remains before bed-time even in a quiet English village—ways, or a way, that may tempt a man who has toiled the live-long day for something under three shillings, and who may have the feeling that there is no hereafter for him in this life. Many who have potato gardens or allotments will seek the other way. This man sought his own bit of earth. He is worth all the respect we have for him: and he is the true gardener.

To own lavish gardens, full of choice plants, and all the apparatus for forcing vegetables and fruits, does not make a man a happy gardener. Such possession has solid advantages, but not this one. Emerson might have said, "It is not you who own the garden—the garden owns you": and often there would be a touch of truth in it. The man with the great garden may by no means always feel at liberty to take off his coat, and dig or weed or rake for himself.



He may be as much in the hands of his chief gardener as the owner of some superb collection of books is in the hands of his librarian. Born in the purple of garden or library, a man has never known the other kind of blessedness, and so will not pine for it. But one can imagine it might be different sometimes with the man who began life as his own gardener, and knew the blessedness of growing his own vegetables and flowers. Charles Lamb was no hypocrite when he lingered on the vanished delight of winning his first edition by hardship and even self-denial in other things: now we are so well off, was his plaint, that when we choose we go out and buy one of these treasures without ado, and there is an end of it; whereas of old we had the pleasure of plotting and planning to secure it; and what a day of triumph that was when, having at length scraped together the money, we set out and bought it, and carried it home and hugged it.

But perhaps the man who most feels the blessedness of growing his own green food, cutting his own fuel, and taking his own honey, is neither the poor man nor the rich; rather he who has chafed long over his sense of depending on others for such things, and come at length to win them by his own hands. Nothing is more common than to hear a townsman or a townsman half his days say how good the feeling is of growing one's own things; and I always believe

that it is said in entire sincerity. There are several reasons why it is so much better to grow what things we can for ourselves rather than depend on others for them. There is the bodily health won to a certainty by this exercise in the open air: a man gets not only the food, but the power to digest it. The potato actually costs less than if we buy it in the market: it is very often a better potato. It is a far more interesting potato. How neat it looked in its careful row in April before we turned the soil over it; and the soil, well dunged and broken up by the frost and clear of ugly weed roots, lay so level on it and was of so rich a colour. Then this way is the primitive as opposed to the artificial way; the way of direct contact with the kind brown earth, from which men tend to become too much estranged. Last, there is something of a virtue, and there is a pure joy for many in working at the earth and its produce in the raw state and on the spot. I do not accept it as truth that intellectual labour is of necessity nobler and more elevating than that which is done by the sweat of the brow and the strength of the body. The manual labourer of the best type never doubts that his work is inferior to brain-work: he has, very often, a simple unreasoned respect for book-learned men, whom he regards as his betters. But this does not point to his inferiority: as we well know, deference is often sign of superiority

in him who pays it, not him to whom it is paid. Magnificent bodily strength and endurance—the latter the greatest physical gift made to men—are often found in men of ignoble nature: but then men of powerful intellect have also in many cases a cruel, bad side to their character. There is no safer and more innocent toil than toil at the earth, in field, garden, or wood; for those whose ordinary work is intellectual, it is purifying and a delight. The more a man really works at his garden, the better for him. Real work means hoeing, raking, mowing, rolling, and, above all, digging with spade or fork: he is not the complete gardener who, being strong of arm, yet looks on always at others doing the hard work, and plays himself with the frills and furbelows. Who was really gardener, one wonders, in the garden where the Sensitive Plant grew?

What is the best position for a garden? Probably the most fruitful gardens, for the choicest flowers and vegetables, are in hollows, at the feet of hills, and in very sheltered spots, where the finest airs for healthy people do not blow freely. I suppose there is little question that, given equal soil, the garden at the foot of the hill and by the water, on the whole, is better for the growth of plants than the garden on the top of the hill, far from the water springs and not well screened from the winds. Those wonderful old walled-in gardens, blazing with

colours through the summer and autumn, are generally in the sheltered spots: and we, whose gardening lots have not been cast in such places, cannot help envying their beauty and fruitfulness. Yet the rush and play of strong winds are often very good: a garden can be too screened for men who gain health and spirits from these. The garden which is the most beautifully placed that I know is round a house on a hill surrounded by the oak woods: away to the south, over these woods, are hills in distant blue. A garden with a view of a country of hills and streams, and a horizon fifteen or twenty miles away, is well set: a garden with wild woods all around, and farm and down land far beyond these, even more so. Happily I remember the way in which this garden, by slow stages, grew out of the wild. The daffodils under the great limes belonged no doubt to the garden of the old home. Nothing else remained of the old garden. The lawns of the new one were made in the course of years, and where the grass is now smooth and fine, I remember I used to lie among the coarse herbage and wild flowers, and watch the butterflies and birds. I can just remember the shrubberies, when the larches and spruce firs were so young that with the help of a small pair of steps I could put my hand into a nest near the top of almost any of them. Now they are tall trees. A score or more of these trees have memories of

this kind for me, though they are grown nearly out of recognition. Such associations endear a garden to us more than any flower that grows in it. I see many gardens which are more finely kept than this one in the wild woods, which have a far greater number of rare and curious plants and shrubs, lawns without a daisy or a plantain, but to me their beauty is only skin-deep. Gardens are planted with thoughts—of all perennials the most enduring. We sometimes have to make new gardens, or take to gardens which were made by strangers. We cannot always grow into them at once.

Yet the bringing back to fruitfulness of a garden strange to us and quite run to seed repays labour. We have felt this in the cottage garden. The lawn had run to seed when we found it; the herbaceous borders were choked with goutweed, dandelions, and other weeds, which had pushed out all but the hardiest and strongest of the flowers. It takes seasons to win back gardens that have run riot like this: there are moments of despair, when it seems as if we never can get the creeping weed roots out of the ground unless we call in several strong workers to our aid; or give up the river and the downs and woods, even the linnet-haunted lane just without the wicket gate, and devote our days to the hoe and spade. No sooner is one bed cleaned than another one, cleaned scarcely a few weeks ago, is growing



rank with weeds, or the lawn is half white with daisies. In the anxiety to get all clean and trim, there is the temptation, to which one falls at times, to hurry through with the digging or hoeing of one bed to attack the weeds that are increasing in another: which means leaving many roots in the ground—the sin for which the unthorough gardener never escaped punishment. But every hour of ungrudging labour tells, in spite of doubt and now and then the feeling of failure, and the reward is real when we look round after a season or two and see the result. Perhaps the lawn won back repays most of all. But there is no resting from labour over the lawn: the more it is cut and rolled, the more it demands: the cleaning and restoring of flower borders and vegetable plots is a simpler and quicker matter, if one digs deep and does not shirk bending and patiently dealing with each weed root.

The cottage garden, with its flowers and vegetables mixed, as I like best to see them, though, like the garden in the woods, set high and swept by wind and rain storm, does not command a wide or far view of landscape. Only through one gap in the hedge is there a glimpse of blue hill, to the north-west. But, as compensation, from our high bank above the road, we look upon delightful farm scenes. Close about us are the pasturing of cattle, sheep in the wattled pens, the hay-makers, the corn harvesters and

the gleaners, the plough, the harrow, the great roller, the drill and the wain, the hedger and the rick-thatcher at work — each of the chief features of the English farming year. It is a pleasant thing to be able to look up from one's work in the garden, or through the window, and enjoy this sight. I care for the wild, but I care, too, for the well-tilled. Patience and endurance are in no farming work better illustrated than in the preparation in March and April of the rough field for another crop. Men and horses at the plough move so slowly that the work of gardening one of these great fields looks almost endless, viewing the narrow strips of earth cut and turned each journey from hedge to hedge. It seems an irony in fate that, with the weather at ploughing and seeding-time so fickle, this work, of all, should be so slow. When at length the last furrow has been ploughed and the harrow has raked and levelled the land, the whole field, set alongside a green pasture, looks from our windows as clean as a new-raked flower-bed, and the grass field beside it like its lawn.

A man who gives his outdoor life to his garden finds each month good therein. He is never without his work or his loving plans. But when the latest summer flowers have died, and the beech and the elm are bare, I have a longing for other scenes. Among the farm lands in the open country, on the green high-set common, above all in the oak woods, the earth's

spell is strong in the winter, by day and by dark. In the cottage garden at this time I sometimes feel cramped, that I am not living life to the full. There is a sense of narrowness which is never felt when life is abounding, green things full of sap, and song and colour everywhere.

The garden joy comes again when white violets are in bloom at the root of the old pear tree and the cirl-bunting breaks into his bold trill. We look through the window and over the garden hedge, to see the peaked and wreathed branches of the larch trees growing into that tender May green of theirs, scarcely equalled in brilliance by the green of the wood birches. They are mingled, in a long line at the edge of the field, with oaks, beeches, and other hard woods. Many times in the autumn and winter the eye has rested with joy on the sloping line of trees. Here I have seen the beech trees carmine, and in winter the grays and darks and purples of the oaks are of subtle beauty. Late in April these shades linger, but they are touched with delicate nameless tints: the twigs in the mass a quarter of a mile away across the meadow are clearly seen to be thickening and flushing with life. On the steep grassy bank at the edge of the garden is our great beech—a noble tree, with long straight trunk and limbs high carried. In early spring it shows no sign of kindling. But the elms, ivy twined across the lane, spreading so

near about us as to be garden trees, littering the herbaceous border with their cast leaves in autumn, are quicker. In April there is a day when, for the first time, we notice how much thicker the network of the elm tree twigs has grown, and that there is red-brown about their tops. The sunshine falls on a part of the tree and shows us that it has begun to grow green: the tiny leaves will be uncrinkling in a day or two about the dark twiggy bole.

No bird builds in our beech. I imagine that tall beech on Selborne hanger, on which the honey buzzard built in Gilbert White's day, as a tree of this girth. But it is a gathering-place for many of the birds which we welcome to the garden. The swallows hold their parties there in late summer: the goldfinches and chaffinches that nest in the yews, the greenfinches and the titmice are ever in this bird-loved tree; a turtle-dove coos out of sight on a high limb through an August afternoon. Eve after eve the cirl-bunting will come into the tree and strike up at the same time to a minute almost. He is a charming garden bird, whose acquaintance as such I made only a few seasons ago: no cirl-bunting ever visits the high garden in the wood: but here we have a pair, nesting in the hedge, or in the hedge of the lane just without, and the male bird will sing on the grayest of days. I have known him to sing long after the nesting season, and in a gale of autumn wind and rain.

His sulphur breast and throat will swell with the earnestness and strength of his bubbling note.

A birdless garden would be a sad spot. Net the raspberries and currants, and protect the sweet peas when first they show, and I do not think one can have too many birds about. The starlings may drop their straws over the lawn and gravel paths in the nest-building time, and in autumn peck the yellowest fruit on the topmost branch of the apple tree, where they spend so many of their happy hours; but they make amends a thousand times by the pleasure they give us through their droll notes—the drawn-out sedative “que-e-eeer” and the “shu-u-u-u-er”—and delightful songs, sung from the apple tree in every month of the year; their camaraderie towards the folk under whose eaves they build; the beautiful shot-blues and greens of their plumage. The thrushes and blackbirds have the keenest eye for the currants and raspberries, and, unless one nets the bushes very closely, they must take their toll of the small fruit. But the blackbird and thrush do now and then give us songs as superb in spirit, as glorious in melody, as those of the nightingale. These are not their songs of every spring day. They are sung very early in the morning, or a little before dusk, in the spring or early summer, and they are so strong and wonderful in power and richness as to seem like songs inspired. I have heard the blackbird exchange his lazy loll for an outburst



of wild enthusiasm and power as the June morning has grown light; and the same fine frenzy fires the song thrush, more often on an overcast, still evening in spring, perhaps when a storm is gathering. Care and doubt lay siege against us in the dark when sleep will not come, and we lie restless and pained. Only is there relief when light glimmers through the blind and the first sleepy notes of the garden birds are heard. Then we rise and open wide the window to look out on a strange, intensely still, colourless world. How healing this is. Beginning before they are quite awake, in a few minutes the thrushes and blackbirds gather strength and sing gloriously; and then the sun flushes the east, and the bloom is on the morning.

A special merit in the thrush's song is its variation. It does not appear to be so set a song as many another bird's. There are always typical thrush idioms or phrases, thrush *words*—for he speaks plainer than any bird in the garden except the starling—in the song; but often there are individual passages, original strains. Last spring we had a thrush nesting in the garden, which had one passage curiously like the “swot, swot, swot, swotty” of the nightingale. Constantly this was produced, and now and then another quick passage reminiscent of the nightingale. I am sure that, when the song began, the bird had not heard a nightingale sing during that spring. The most typical song-thrush note

in our bird was the "pee-bur, pee-bur, pee-bur," pure and sweet.

The starlings, the song thrushes, and black-birds stay about the gardens most of their lives, those at least that nest with us; the storm-cock, which nests in the yews or in the ivied elm, scarcely leaves till the yew berry season is over, and returns in March. But most of the summer birds are visitors for only a few days. Some appear in April, on their way to their wood and hedge haunts, the chiff-chaff, the blackcap, and the lovely little lesser whitethroat, and spend a day or two with us at the close of summer when their travels are beginning afresh. One week in August a nightingale came into the beech-tree with that strong note, full of angry character, "kurr, kurr," and took up its quarters in the corner of the garden hedge that belongs to the wren. One day the two birds met, the wren, curious or defiant, following up the nightingale a little, viewing it, I thought, as a poacher—a comic illustration of bird dignity and impudence. The wren is a scold, even out of nesting-time. When I disturbed this tiny bird from the scrap of ivy where he roosts, he flew into the yew bush a few yards away, and ducked and protested, making repeatedly the sound that is like the winding-up of one of the old turnip watches.

The spotted flycatchers are the only summer visitors that come to build in the garden. Set

in the jessamine against the house, the nest is warmed by the rays of the sun direct and refracted from the wall. Therefore, even when the eggs have been sat on for some days, the birds can often leave the nest for a while. Cock and hen flycatchers sit by turns, but often both are off the eggs for ten minutes, even twenty. When the hen sits hard her mate will bring her food, but in a more casual way than that of the gray or the pied wagtail. A heavy cloud comes across the sun, or a shower of rain falls, and the eggs, if exposed, are at once covered by the hen, who then sits much closer. She knows by some reasoning process, or by what we call instinct, that the eggs, when the young are fast developing within the frail shells, can be safely left only when the sun warms them.<sup>1</sup> She is not less wise in her unconcern of people coming and going past her nest, and sitting on the lawn within a few yards of it. She slips on and off her nest whilst we are present without a note or any sign of uneasiness. Extremely watchful as birds are whilst sitting, and wary, when strangers are near, of going to the nest, they come to recognise and be fearless of friendly folk around them.

Late in July the flycatchers hatched out their young. Owing to the cold and rains that set in,

<sup>1</sup> But the wild duck, when disturbed, will leave her eggs, even in an advanced stage of incubation, for several hours without ill effect, perhaps owing partly to the thick shell.

only one of the young lived till August. A few days later the behaviour of both cock and hen changed. They were fussy and agitated for two days, especially when I went near their nest. Yet I could not see them carry food to the young. The third day I looked into the nest, and found the half-fledged young bird stiff and cold: it had been dead for perhaps two days. The same day the parents left the garden, out of which they had scarcely flown for six weeks. Once, a little later in the month, one of the birds returned, but not for an hour: afterwards we saw no more of them. That the agitation of these birds was over their dead child, I could not doubt, though perhaps the nest was not actually visited after the loss. The incident is contrary to my experience of the action of birds after the loss of their young. Grief, I believe, is poignant whilst it lasts, but it is very short-lived—all our observation points to this. The grief heard by some in the song of the nightingale, which has lost its young or its mate, is purely of the imagination. The song is all triumph and joy. That divine part of the passion of grief, its steady strength to endure, though time and occupation conspire to heal the wound, belongs to man only. There is no widowhood of the heart outside his race. The secret scars of old grief which men carry bring them closer to Christ than any gift of high understanding.

They fear the dishonour to forget, are ready with an excuse—

O last regret, regret can die !  
No—mixt with all this mystic frame,  
Her deep relations are the same,  
But with long use her tears are dry.

The birds, if the season is not too far advanced, will soon set to work to cure their wounds with a new nest and new young. Late in July 1903, owing to the storms and cold of June, many small birds were engaged with eggs and young. I found nest after nest in the fields about the garden with addled and ruined eggs in June and July, linnets', red-backed shrikes', and chaffinches'. The mother-bird quickly finds out when her eggs have been spoilt, and leaves them. When the eggs hatch, and one or two of the young perish through the cold and wet or other causes, she gives no rein to grief, but simply concentrates on her living children. In one day I found three dead young birds belonging to nests of linnet, greenfinch, and garden-warbler. The mothers, or the parents between them, cast out of the nests their dead, that these may not prove hurtful to the living. I have seen the starling carrying away from the nest the body of its dead chick. The young greenfinch, when I found it, had not yet been cast out: its body was scarcely cold. The young linnet hanged stark on a thorn outside the nest. The young garden-warbler lay half in



half out of the nest : the old bird had not been able to get it quite over the edge. So there this pitiful thing dangled on the nest in the lane that glorious July day, the mother with unconcern going in and out across the corpse to feed her three other children. This is the attitude of all animals save man towards their dead — insensitiveness, non-recognition indeed. The rapt passion of the bird for her young is moving to see, exquisite in refinement. An hour, less than an hour, after the loss not a memory or a pang remains. Herein the world of difference lies between the deep affections of man and those of all other animals. Man feels his dead immortal, wrests with time, hopes for the meeting in the far by-and-by. He sublimates them with “the charm ‘Forever.’”

In a garden where fruits and vegetables share the soil with flowers and trees, use and beauty mingled, there may well be bees as well as birds. Bees indeed have always seemed to me as proper in a garden as birds. An intimacy with bees, a confidence in handling them, should be part of the accomplishment of all who are to grow up experienced in the natural pursuits of the country. It is often my regret that I paid so little attention to bees when a child. My home was a paradise surely for bees. I cannot remember when there were not colonies of bees about the house roof, quite independent of those under the old straw skep near the kitchen garden. It cannot have

been wholly the fear of stings that deterred me, for I made little of storming the nests of the wasps in those days. But the straw skep, and the holocaust at the end of the season, were not inviting, and this was our system at home. Now I have bees, but the ease and confidence in handling them are a little slow of growth. It is one thing, armed with net and smoker, to take or move the sections in the morning or at mid-day during the height of the honey flow: another to be bee-master; really to control the hive, with the bare hand taking out and examining the frames alive with the workers, and doing all that may be necessary. A bee-sting on the hand is not so severe a punishment. But make a serious mistake once or twice in the learning, and enrage the hive, and confidence at the outset may be much retarded.

The complete mastery which men have obtained over bees, the insight which they now have into their economy, is a triumph of husbandry which belongs largely to our own time. The loving spirit of the bee-master, of course, is no new thing. It goes far back into the history of civilisation, and in England several centuries ago a Hampshire parson, Charles Butler of Basingstoke, wrote a little book called "The Female Monarchy," informed by this spirit in every quaint page. It is a delightful glimpse we have of the loving master moving serene among his hives; when the bees grow excited or threatening,

putting them gently away from his head with the hand ; protecting them from enemies, some perhaps real, as the "colemouse" or great titmouse, others imaginary, as the "progne" or swallow. And there are ills that honey can cure, which might have made Sir Thomas Browne add a chapter to his *Pseudodoxia*. But the enlightened husbandry of the bees, as we follow it to-day, belongs to our own time. The humane and saving system by which we avail ourselves of the bees' stores without sacrificing their hives is entirely modern. Sentiment makes us regret the loss of some of the old, simple methods of husbandry, but not the old way of bee-keeping. The wooden hive, with its beautiful arrangement of frames, sections, and wax foundation to save the bees labour, is in all ways better than the old straw skep. Even to the eye it appeals more : it is so pleasant to see the line of the white hives at the edge of the garden, pasture field, or wood. Then with the aid of the smoker how much more we can learn of the life and work of the bees than could our ancestors. Probably we are not more than on the threshold of knowledge as to how this wondrous, perfectly ordered community has come about, of the origin of its laws and its intelligence. We do not know how bees communicate with each other ; nor the system by which the work of the hive is divided, some honey, some pollen seekers, others air-fanners, guards, garnishers. Yet think

of the curious and deeply interesting information which has been amassed by practical bee-keepers as well as by naturalists since the days of Huber—the Newton of bee study. The master knows each flower, obscure and bright coloured, from which his bees draw their stores, the distance they will travel in search of it; he knows the strength or weakness of each of his hives, and can build up the weak ones against the honey flow. He knows of their diseases, and can act as physician to them. He can fetch and carry queens for them, aid them in the hard work of keeping the hive clean and wholesome, supply them with just the amount of warmth or of cool air which they need for well-being. He has a hundred devices and plans for their health and vigour: and all are founded on hard practice and close intelligent observation and reason. The science of the wise bee-master of to-day is a wholly benign triumph of husbandry. Here is nothing to repel the most sensitive: no taking of life: no cheating the bees of their hard-won livelihood even; for, in exchange for the honey, we give them other sweet food whenever they need it. Are we parasites on the bees? If so, the case resembles that group in the vegetable world where the parasite and the form of life to which it attaches itself derive mutual good through the relation.

All to do with a hive of healthy bees is good. It is sure refreshment to watch them come and

go between the garden and the field of sainfoin, to listen to them high up among the honey-laden lime-tree flowers. "I have seen the trees," said the ancient bee-master of the village, who to-day has some seventy skeps, "a-shine with honey, with the sun on them." Tell him what is the day of the month, and from experience, better than all the gathered science taken from the books, because of the long, laborious winning of it by observation, he can say how much more honey is to come. I like his cure for the bee's sting, just a little honey from one of the combs rubbed into the wound. But the old villager himself has grown almost sting-proof. He is known often to handle his hives or take a swarm, without troubling to cover his face with a veil. To the village bee-master it would be wanton waste to suffer even a swarm irritable through over-long exposure and want of food to be lost, because he had no gauze at hand with which to protect the face. You see, too, less skilled villagers, with no protection for their faces, taking the combs in the autumn: they will pick off the angry bees, which fasten to their hands and arms or crawl up their legs, with scarcely an exclamation, as though the punishment were lighter than a nettle sting.

It is from the sainfoin that my bees draw most of their honey. Not more than a day will pass before a hive of bees, strange to a place, will find these fields, and from early morning till dusk



bring in their burthens. There must be some perfect system by which the bees of a hive communicate to their fellows the news of the honey and pollen fields. There must be clock-work arrangement that cannot go wrong, by which some bees will make the combs and fetch the pollen, saffron or deep-orange coloured; others concentrate on the work of bearing the honey; others garnish the hive, and guard it; others preserve the proper temperature by air-fanning. I often see a little band of workers busy at the entrance by the alighting board, air-fanning, and they will begin sometimes early in May: perhaps there will be only three or four at work, many others vibrating their wings intensely, out of sight inside the hive. These workers at the entrance, if it be the tremendously eager period of the chief honey flow, will be constantly hustled and pushed by their fellows coming back with stores. Yet they never desist from their labours for more than a few seconds at a stretch: reared up on the tips of their legs, they will vibrate their wings for a minute without taking rest. How did the bees learn this method of saving their home and storehouse from becoming overheated? Not the devices of the sphex herself are to me harder to think of apart from a Mind and Maker than the device of the bee-fanner. I wonder at the immense faith of a man who can watch his bees thus at work and never have a doubt as to the law which brought these things about; but I cannot cultivate

its fervour. Like Sir Thomas Browne, he indeed does exercise his faith in the difficultest point.

Though probably not one small hive even could flourish on the produce of the garden alone, the garden harvest of honey, of propolis (the cement of the bee-builder) and of pollen are larger than some people suppose. Pollen in quantity is gathered from many of the spring and summer garden flowers. The box tree and the arabis in April, the raspberry bushes in May, yield something: and then by the middle of this month the honey flow begins in earnest when the pear and apple trees are in blossom. There are people so unfortunate as not to notice the wonderful wealth of colour and combination of colour in the earth and sky in England; who fancy that they must go far, even to the Tropics, for these things. If they lived in Persia or in the Tropics they would be cheated with the idea that they must come to England for the choicest colours and arrangement of colours in Nature. I used to think sometimes that the distant hills on the horizon, which we see from the high home common, with the purple bloom upon them, were finer and fuller of mystery than our own, till I reached them one day, and looked back; and the bloom lay then on the woods and the common I had come from. It is idle to imagine that we need larger drafts on the bank of colour, wild song and scent, than can be drawn in England at the crowning of her year. One can

sit or lie for hours on a sun-steeped May day under the old apple tree on the lawn, and not have nearly enough of it. The glorious mass of pink and white blossom set against the serene blue, where cumulus, the dense but benign day cloud, sails, is loud with our bees: these too are the white lilac days: it is not possible to have enough of them. If I wish to exchange these days in England for days abroad, it is because I have not a full understanding of their beauty. Cosmopolitanism in Nature and scenery is the cult of the unthorough.

On such a May day as this we put the new hive in the corner set apart for the bees, where a short flight takes them to the sainfoin. Painting the hive—it should be snow-white—even fixing the foundation comb in the bar-frames take time at a season when time is very precious. But husbandry in which everything is done for us, everything ready made, loses not a little of its value. It is becoming very much a life of ready-made, machine-made commodities. In order to concentrate ourselves on one particular occupation and make a livelihood or a name by it, we allow ourselves to depend on other men for most of the necessities and conveniences of life. To be doers in one thing, we are content to be sufferers in all the rest. I envy the man who, put to it or from choice, can be his own builder, carpenter, husbandman, cook.

When the new beehive was put in position all

the bee-keepers about us were making ready for swarms. One swarm had been hived that morning by the villager who owns the seventy straw skeps. The old man is close upon eighty, his neighbours say, though in these cases it may be hard to determine the age to a few years. Very old villagers, if the date of their birth is not recorded in a family Bible, will often lose count of it themselves; and, unless the register of the parish throws light on the matter, there is no way of clearing it up. The exact age, the date of birth seventy or eighty years ago, after all do not matter a great deal to the old villager. He grows slow and stiff of movement, his sight has almost gone; but, from long use, he is as much at his ease in handling the bees as blind Huber was in reasoning on their habits and economy.

The village bee-master never "heard tell" of Huber and his discoveries. All he knows of bees he has learnt for himself; and that he is strong in practice is shown by the fact that between his bees and his walnuts he ekes out a living for himself. A knowledge of Huber's discoveries are not more necessary for the man of practice only than a knowledge of the beautiful experiments on the colour-sense of bees which Sir John Lubbock carried out with complete success. Nor have Huber's observations any of the winning literary touch of Maeterlinck's. But his was an extraordinary story of

achievement. By years of exquisitely minute study and reason, he either discovered for himself or confirmed each of the most wonderful features of their life and work. His theories were attacked by some observers. In a book named "Bees: their Natural History and General Management," by Huish, an Englishman, contempt and ridicule were poured on Huber. But to-day all his chief statements are known to be true. Huber made known the marriage flight of the queen-bee: he confirmed the theory of Schirach that bees have the power to turn the larvæ of ordinary workers which are not more than three days old into queens, which Reaumur, a great naturalist in the same field, did not suspect; and at the same time he put Schirach right in regard to the age at which these larvæ must be operated on. He described the weird piping cry of the queen-bees at certain seasons, and the fierce duels, always to the death, between the rival queens in the hive. Swammerdam, followed by Reaumur, had held that the workers were not only sterile, they were neuter in sex: Huber established the fact that the workers are females, and that they are not all infertile, but have the power to lay drone eggs. By a long series of minute, patient experiments he threw light on the senses of the bees, their powerful sight and smell, their method of cell architecture. One and all these experiments were carried through triumphantly by a man stone-blind! Huber had



lost his sight when he came with enthusiasm to the study of bees. He saw through the eyes of Pierre Huber, his son, and a faithful servant named Burnens. Absorbed in the wonder and intense interest of his experiments, he could even forget his terrible infirmity. "I have seen, I have seen with my own eyes," he would say in his enthusiasm. But no account of Huber would be a true one which did not tell of the heroism and devotion of his wife. He paid her the finest tribute that a blind man could pay—"As long as she lived I was not sensible of the misfortune of being blind."

The garden joy seems at the zenith when on a May day we can lie on the turf, and glory in the apple's pink-white blossom with its background of azure, its murmur of bees; but such days are rare in May, and it is only later that we may get something like an abundance. All through a fair summer the joy waxes. There is little waning till the days have passed when the red admirals take their last sip of sweets of the Michaelmas daisies. Even after this there are faint revivals, that we would not miss. So late as the beginning of November the cirl-bunting, his spring and summer mate once more beside him, has come just before dusk into the elm to trill bold and clear, though his beauty of colour has faded, and with it his distinction. A fortnight earlier the lark, lost to sight in the lead of the October sky, was singing

intensely over the stubble-field across the road ; indeed, we often hear the larks in autumn pouring forth song through storms of wild rain that make pulp of the gravel walk, and form melancholy pools in the slightest hollow of the lawn. But these are the phantoms of the summer. The hours of fine weather that at this season we give to the garden are for hard work with the spade and the barrow. We have reaped and spent the harvest of our delight. We hardly more than played at work on the best of the summer days. It was mainly a feast, often interrupted, renewed each time with more zest, of colour, form, scent, and song ; at the end of each good day the great curtain of yellow and purple and molten gold drawn across the west, and flushing the earth behind the elms in the lane, giving place slowly to the solemn monochrome ; and this in turn to the vast, lulling rule of the star-thick firmament.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE SHINING RIVER

FOR those who have known from childhood a true English chalk stream, no country can be perfect which has not running water, exquisite in pureness. The clear chalk streams of England, which are neither sluggish nor impetuous, but serene in their flow, are mirrors which, reflecting, can almost add to the beauty of earth and sky. Those flowers of Shelley which

“gaze at themselves in the stream’s recess,  
Till they die of their own dear loveliness,”

grew by no waters more crystal than those of the chalk. It is impossible that the eye should tire of this streak of shining white threaded

through the green of summer. One can sit and watch the play of the currents, the wild eddy and swirl rose-red at sundown, the glass-smooth flats, for hours on a fair day, and feel only refreshment and the happy calm. There is a sense of intimate companionship about the river. The persuasive voice of the water, most calming of Nature's sounds, its instant sensitiveness to the slightest change in the light and the day, the sparkle and the stir of it—these endue the stream with a kind of personality. It grows to be to us who love to haunt it in the summer days a living, sympathising thing, responsive, attuned to our best, and therefore serenest, moods. I cannot recall any sense of loneliness felt by the banks of the chalk stream on a summer day: but it must be summer for our enjoyment or early autumn. Winter makes a most woful wreck of the river-side; for months the havoc lies unhid; not till May is at the prime is all trace of the ruin done by autumn and winter covered. It is scarcely before July that the green on the river-side is completed. I have gone down to the river then, after several weeks of absence, and the intense green of its banks has at first almost dazed or oppressed me. The same feeling is sometimes experienced when one enters a garden in June about the time the columbines are flowering, when the bright yellow and white flowers of spring—daffodils, tulips and wall-flowers, lilac, too, and laburnum—are over,

and the lawn is at its prime, and every tree and shrub has fully leafed. But it is an oppression which may be closely allied with a relief. An hour or less by the river or in the garden at this time accustoms the eye to the wonderful wealth of the colour, and we steep ourselves in it. There are colours and combinations of colours more delicate by far, subtler in beauty, than this heavy, substantial green of the earth; but does any minister so surely to the health and strength of the sight of a man? That green is the best of colours for the eye is always held: could it be otherwise, considering that this is the great earth-colour, taking the year as a whole?

Had I, then, only a few days each year to spend by the river-side, I might choose them early in July, when the reed-beds are at length tall and thick. And in making this choice I should not forget what I must miss of beautiful river-side sights and sounds in the spring and first few weeks of summer.

There are three spots in this thirty or forty miles of water, spring-clear and spring-cold, sweeping round the low hills, winding in large easy curves among the rail-haunted meadows, that we know best and care for most. First, there is the marsh and its thatched hamlet, which lie near the middle of the river's course. I have never been in any place which withdraws one more securely from the world's unrest than this. A forest covers the slopes on one side of



the stream; on the other, the valley broadens out a little, and within an angle made by the main river and a tributary stream of ten miles or so in length, which flows in by the village below, is the marsh. Here, too, the main river sends out branches, some natural, others artificial; so when the springs are high, the place is a real marsh, meadow and waste being under water for months at a stretch. The hamlet is at the edge of the marsh; it has about twenty cottages, a small inn, an ancient mill, the farm-house with linden walk, walled-in garden and orchard. This is all; no church, no doctor, no shop. In Domesday Book the name is spelt almost as it is to-day; but, beyond the remains of some earthworks, obscure in origin—the Ansdike—there is no trace of lost greatness or importance about it. One likes to think of the hamlet lapt in rest for its thousand years or more of existence. It has made such an abundant store of quiet, saving this up, and putting by year upon year and century upon century, at compound interest, that the most uneasy spirit, coming here and staying awhile, might find surcease. Some days in our lives lose little of their lustre. The lights and shades of them, the slight touches, the trivial words and looks, are preserved clear and bright on the marvellous film of the mind. This is done without the least conscious effort or will on our part. Indeed, when we resolve to keep fresh in memory faces and words, moving

passages in our lives, often we fail miserably. The radiancy of the place, the brimming stream murmuring at the weirs, the open, wide marsh, with its row of elms at the lower end, a piece of that scenery in which there is a certain quality of the sadness which is close allied with joy, made an impression on us both, which years have not dimmed. We came to the place in the great first week of June, in a season when the springs were so high that the larger part of the common was a true marsh. I shall never forget the indescribable aroma of freshness we were conscious of indoors and out of doors; the walk after dusk up the road to the little bridge over the flashing, palpitating water; our lunch next day far away over the marsh under the line of elms. It is hard to think steadily and undismayed of the inevitable time coming swift to meet us all when active life ends. But whilst a man's mind is stored with clear memories of the most radiant of his days, he cannot be all pitiable; it is when memory fades and shrivels that the man does seem to have lived too long. Yet he will cling to the last poor threads of life, be old age never so sapless. At the very edge of the marsh are two of the oldest cottages of the hamlet. The spot was damp to be chosen for a dwelling-house. Often when coming back to the inn from my long days of fly-fishing, and bird and flower hunting on the marsh, I have seen that wraith of the river night, stratus, the

earth-cloud, drawing in about these cottages, muffling them with its cloak of gray. A man must be proof indeed against damp who can dwell long in such a spot and not feel it to the marrow when age has hold of him. Yet the cottages, painted and repaired, at once found new tenants when the old ones died a few years since. In one of these cottages the oldest man in the hamlet had lived for fifty-five years. His roots had struck so deep in the spot that he might have withered and died sooner had he been removed to kinder soil. As it was, he lived or half lived to be ninety, working a little at odd jobs in a neighbour's garden. There was no reason for the man to work, except that to cease work would have been to hasten the creeping end. This seemed to me the most broken worker I had ever seen, one might have thought beyond the power to handle a spade. Yet he worked in the garden within a very few days of his death. He lived alone in the cottage. The day before the end a little girl came to him with a basin of soup. He had, however, a fancy for beer—odd in a man of ninety, never a drinker, and now hovering between life and death. So the child went down the ladder staircase and drew him a glass of ale from his own small barrel. A doctor might have forbidden it; but how could it possibly matter? Next day this ancient solitary was found dead; the end had come before the dawn. At the bedside were

the fragments of his last supper, a little ale with some bread and cheese. Nobody appears to have seen him alive after the child had drawn the ale and left the cottage. Could he have crept downstairs and brought the food up? No anxious heir watched at the end; but he died far from destitute. He had saved several hundred pounds, which were invested in Consols, on the interest of which, with two little pensions, he had lived for years. The old man could not justly be described as a miser; rather he exercised strict economy in his way of life. Eighteenpence a week was his house rent; he would only buy new-laid eggs when these could be bought at sixteen for a shilling, whilst to drink unskimmed milk appealed to him as a wicked extravagance. His savings passed to no near relative or friend. His small store of goods and chattels were sold; these included an old oak stand with drawers, and willow-pattern plates, which we have to-day to recall to us radiant days spent about the marsh and in the hamlet. The adjoining cottage sheltered for a long span of years an old couple, who died within a few hours of each other, over eighty. The palsied husband was grinding at the mill only a matter of hours before his natural death from old age: the wife could not linger on. Their lives were bound so fast together that the fading out of one must cause the fading out of the other. So, within a month or little more, this

pathetic trio, uncared for, unessential, went the last way—

“thro’ those dark gates, across the wild  
That no man knows.”

And already it might perplex any of the villagers to say for sure which of the grassy mounds in the churchyard on the slope were theirs. Their homes, each rented at eighteenpence a week, were largely mud-built, with thatched roofs slanting down at the back within two or three feet of the ground, with the smallest windows, over which the thatch arched like an eyebrow. The thatch was worn and rotted by rain and mists, loosened in places by the winds, by mice and birds: the ceilings sadly needed whitewash, and the walls new paper. Yet these homes, almost the poorest and humblest which could be imagined above the standard of the hut or hovel, were set in a scene that makes a surer appeal to the heart alert for beauty than many lavish houses standing in splendid pleasure-ground. At their doors sang in soft undertone the smaller of the rivers that make the marsh. It drives the wheel of the old mill, which is a hundred yards up the road. This is a river that runs a course of not more than a dozen miles, but it is rich in delicate landscape: here a cottage garden and a cottage group, mother with children waiting at the wicket to welcome home the field-worker—a George Morland home and scene: a sedgy corner for



the reed bird and the rail: a gray spire among the elms or a small red brick tower, or some seventeenth-century manor-house or farm. If you climb the highest of the little hills above the narrow valley, where at points the stream bends round almost at a right angle, you see, in blue deepening to duskiest purple, the two great woods in the distance, the first clear cut, the farthest blurred against the sky. A river at a point far down its course is richer for us if we can go over in thought beautiful scenes through which it has flowed: so that this stream, at the spot by the cottages where it enters the marsh, has much claim to the regard of him who often has followed it downward from the source.

On one side of the road lies the patch of wet ground where, among mat grasses, dense clumps of which stand high and dry, and the sedges and rushes, the shy skulking water-rail nested: on the other, from June far into September, *mimulus*, the monkey flower of the hamlet children, is a sheet of glory. The rich yellow flowers spotted with brown flourish here better than at any point by the side of these chalk streams. This is the flower sight of the hamlet; once we have seen the *mimulus* massed, we wish to return summer after summer to find it again at the prime. Strange that this bold, splendid flower, with home thousands of miles over the sea, should have taken so kindly to such deep-hid, quiet, English spots. Here and there it has established itself



*A Hamlet of Doomsday.*

Allen & Co. Sa



throughout the middle and upper parts of this chalk stream, so that now I can go to a good many places in ten or twelve miles of stream where I know the *mimulus* will be glowing any summer day. One half shrinks from plucking some wild plants; there is a look, a suggestion of consciousness, about them; it may not be so with *mimulus*, but the appearance of the flower does give the impression of pride in splendour, a glorying in the gifts of the water and sun and pure air of its home by the marsh. It has the corner between the road and the hedge quite to itself. No yellow-strife or hemp-agrimony or spires of purple loosestrife would have a chance to flourish in this brilliant colony from the New World. The story of its planting has never been known, and must always be obscure. It is not even known whether *mimulus* has gradually spread up stream, or whether it has worked down. By no means every patch of marsh or wet soil by the river will suit *mimulus*. Isolated plants will spring up in places, but, after a season or two, they die out. It flourishes only in patches, large or small, even about the hamlet, its headquarters on the stream. Years ago a few roots were taken from the marsh and planted in the moist end of the inn garden, where they still flower each summer; but here they have formed no strong colony.

The marsh abounds with flower and bird life through the summer. There is the pale yellow

needle whin or furze in May, and close by the little pink blossoms of the bog pimpernel, frail as the harebell, peer through the heath grasses in July and August. At the river edge, the wild guelder-rose or water-elder is at its finest in the late summer, when I have seen its clusters of scarlet berries distinctly at a distance of many hundreds of yards. In autumn, when the leaves in some years turn to a colour almost as bright as the fruit, the whole bush burns red. With mimulus, this guelder-rose is the most splendid thing of colour on the marsh. But there are crimson tiger moths here, and perhaps throughout the river valley, red admiral butterflies, and the fiery, small, copper butterfly, which lingers on into the autumn, flickering about the dry mounds by the farm orchard. There one can sit and watch the goldfinches in their September parties constantly pass to and fro between the thistles at the edge of the marsh. The red and yellow pippins in some seasons are thick on the trees, for this is one of the old English farm orchards which bear heavy crops. Everything is complete about the farm—orchard, filbert walk, peach and nectarine walls, broad herbaceous borders, avenue of limes for ornament and for the profit of the bee-master; within the house, the apple loft, the baking oven, heated by crackling, flaming bavons; at the kitchen ceiling the rack for the home-cured hams. Then there are the great barns, built hundreds of years ago so



strongly of oak beams about the roof, that to pull them down, let alone to put other more convenient ones in their place, would seem too heavy a labour and expense in times strict economy in farming is necessary. So some of the thatched barns are for the present safe. Losing them, the place would lose one of the most characteristic features of graceful, complete English village life. Beautiful are the weathered grays and browns of the large tithe and threshing barns of our land that stand by the eighteenth-century farm-houses or are surrounded by the wheat-fields and water-meadows. There are lights and shadows peculiar to their straw or reed covered roofs, their timbered walls.

The marsh is the home of many birds. There are all the common water-birds, nesting among the reeds and rank river-side growths—moorhens, coots, little grebes, and mallards. On a July evening, at sundown, I have heard the grasshopper-warblers filling the still air with their reel, powerful in so small a bird almost beyond belief. But many an hour has been spent in vain search for the nest with the delicate pink-freckled eggs. The reel of the grasshopper-warbler at eve, the sudden loud laugh, or the whinny, of water-fowl after dark, the eternal plaint of the peewits, the bleat of the snipe, are the voices which we associate chiefly with the marsh by day and night; whilst sometimes after dark, coming from a neighbouring field, there will

minge with the voices of the marsh birds that whistle that startled Enid, for the great plover or stone curlew is a dweller in summer in large open farms hereabouts.

It is the nightly concert on the marsh that is most curious and alluring. After dark I used to go there and listen to it. An hour after the sun sank behind the wooded hill, the night-spirit of the marsh will awake to exercise its sway. In the secret wood-ways the voice of the night-spirit seems to be in the trees, which whisper or murmur or roar, as the breezes fall or freshen. On the marsh she speaks through the voices of her restless birds in the spring and the early summer. In April, May, and June, whether it be inky dark or a bright moon or starlit night, the concert of the peewits, snipes, the grebes and moorhens, lasts through most of the night. It is at its loudest near the middle of the marsh, where in June the white patches of glossy cotton-grass might be seen even in the dark. Here the restless peewits, dozens of them, twist and cry overhead, and the "tchak tchak" tells that the snipe is on the wing, stirred by the passion of the nesting season. I have listened for long, fascinated by the strangeness of it. I have hoped to hear, too, the bleat of the snipe, but, though the "tchak, tchak" comes from a snipe flying, I never could hear the bleat after dark, the wing music so strong to soothe the charmed listener who strains to see the bird cutting downward

through the air from far heights. I have been told, however, that the bleating or drumming is sometimes heard after dark, at nine o'clock for instance on a May night, and, though this is so contrary to my experience, I am loath to question it. A man may closely watch a species of bird for many years and yet miss some occasional but distinctive habit which others have seen more than once. Very few people have seen a flock of the full snipe, though the wisp is common. But there is such a thing as a flock of snipe. Twice a water and marsh fowl sportsman, whom I have met, has seen a flock. Shooting on a sheet of water in the east of England, he and his companion flushed a flock of snipe numbering fifty or more. The birds flew off to about a mile's distance, wheeled round, keeping good order, and came dashing back over the water so near that a shot brought down several. These birds cut through the air just over the water at the pace and in the manner of some of the swiftest of the birds that always move in flocks during the winter.

We look for the aerial peewit turns and twists with their accompanying cry in the spring and summer only; but long after the time of nests and courtship I have seen a single peewit suddenly detach itself from a large flock that has been working the ploughed land for food, and go through this performance. This was some curious freak, or a memory of spring days it

may be. It is impossible to doubt that the peewit performance is closely connected with courtship and the transport of the nesting season. But there are puzzling features in it, which I have not been able to clear up to my satisfaction. In his flights at this time, the peewit moves through the air in such a manner as to show off his plumage to advantage, supposing his mate or intended mate is watching him from the ground below or close by. Now turning to one side, swiftly recovering and turning to the other, he shows to perfection his bold and brilliant colours, black and white, glossy green and purple. This exposure of now one side, now the other, is the most constantly repeated action, but once at least in the course of each flight he executes a swift movement, which formerly I took to be a complete somersault: now I am inclined to think that it is only a half turn and a very quick recovery. Ordinarily, the peewit's flight is of a slow flapping kind, showing no great mastery of the air, but during these twistings and swervings it is often fleet as the wind. Suddenly, after cumbrous-seeming movements, he will swoop down, all but touching the earth, and for a hundred yards travel at high speed.

What determines the hen peewit in her choice of a mate against the nesting season? If we accept the theory generally that the male birds of many species show off and parade their fine feathers to win the approval of the females, we

shall scarcely make an exception of the peewit. Of familiar English birds there is not one which, by its antics and evolutions in the air and on the ground, seems to be a better illustration of the theory than the peewit. But it is certain that these aerial performances are carried on long after the choice has been made, the nest scraped together, and the eggs laid and even hatched. It is also true that both then and earlier in the season, before the first egg has been laid, the peewit will swoop and twirl and cry when no female is by to watch and admire. I have not the slightest doubt that the male peewit goes through this performance indifferent as to whether the female bird is watching or not. It is simply his ecstasy. I believe it is often the same with the bleating of the snipe, and with the song of many birds. The male bird sings for the joy that is in him, the fulness of life: I see no reason to hold that his songs are always to please his mate or to defy a rival, though there are times when both these motives are strong. When the peewit shows off on the ground, turning round so that he makes a slight hollow, like that in which the nest is placed, it is different. Here the hen bird must be near and conscious of the performance, as in the case of the house sparrow, the greenfinch, the domestic pigeon, and, I suppose, the black-game and ruff. It is remarkable how little notice the courted hen takes, or *seems* to take, of the antics of her suitor. The male



greenfinch will be in a flutter of excitement, flinging himself about before her, spreading out his charms. It is very likely that she will merely peck at him and fly away, or, whilst he acts thus, she will search for food with unconcern. I have never seen the hens watching with evident interest or admiration. It is said that at the "balz" of the black-game the hens will watch, and also at the gatherings of ruff and reeve: but there is contradictory evidence as to the latter birds: Colonel Montagu, who watched these parties in England, says that in their fights the ruffs hurt each other: whereas Mr. E. T. Booth, who watched the fights at close quarters, says that he never saw any of the birds in the least hurt, though they would jump and strike a little in the way of a game-cock. Each fight was soon over: two ruffs would square up at one another for a few moments, and separate: they might then seek food for a little, and presently square up again.

The conduct of the male peewit when one comes near the nest is very familiar to watchers of birds. Whilst the hen peewit slips quietly off her nest and makes away, he with clamour swoops and tumbles in the air close to the intruder. This is like the stratagems of partridge and mallard when their young are approached; but there is a puzzling feature about the peewit's conduct which does not occur in the case of the other birds. The peewit will often behave in

this way when no intruder makes it uneasy. I have stood or lain on the marsh and watched the peewits clamouring and swooping about their nests in just the same way as when I approached them: yet there has been nobody to disturb the birds; and they have certainly not been intent to draw me away from their nests, for they have not seen me.

The play of the peewit is at the height in March and April, but some birds wheel and clamour far into the summer. Their restlessness hardly ends till the autumn flocks have formed and spread through the land. In winter, on a sparkling day, it is a beautiful sight when fifty peewits or more are on the wing together taking exercise. I have seen the sheen of their green and satiny feathers flash far in these winter flights: and then winter, with her verdant water-meadows and sunshine, is lenient indeed.

All day through May and June the cuckoos call from the willows and reed-beds, sometimes far into the night. Each flight they take has a curious, magnetic effect on some small bird by the river. Now it is a sedge-warbler that is scolding the cuckoo, now a reed-bunting, but on the more open ground of the marsh it is the meadow pipit which is always most affected by the cuckoo's presence. When the cuckoo is quite in the open of the marsh nest-seeking among the bents and tussocks, it will be mobbed

and stormed at by a dozen or more pipits, with skylarks, buntings, and other small birds. Perhaps it is because we know the cheating habit of the cuckoo—but, about the actions of the bird when thus teased, there does seem to be a sly consciousness. The cuckoo does not give one the same impression when it is attended by a single pipit. On the same day I have seen a cuckoo come, time after time, into a certain tree—though perhaps not always the same cuckoo—and call. Each time it has been closely waited on by a single meadow pipit. The cuckoo has kept shifting its perch a little in the corner of the meadow: it has left the tree and perched in the grass; down comes the pipit to perch a yard away, in the grass also. The cuckoo flies to a hedge close by, and sits on a stake there: the pipit flies to the hedge to sit on a stake a yard or two away. Of its attendant, the cuckoo appears to be, and, I am inclined to think, through habit practically is, unconscious; certainly its attitude towards its follower is one of large indifference; the pipit, as we might say, does not “get on the nerves” of the cuckoo. Finally, the cuckoo rises and flies away from the corner of the meadow: the pipit rises, cries out, flies after the cuckoo for a few yards, darts at it as if to strike, but always swerves away at the last moment without striking: then the mesmeric influence, or whatever it be that makes the pipit attend the cuckoo, is over, and the

pipit concerns itself no more with the cuckoo until one comes again into the corner of the meadow and alights there, when exactly the same thing takes place. Somebody has described the conduct of the pipit towards the cuckoo as one of obsequious attendance. It does look like obsequiousness, until the cuckoo leaves, and the pipit cries out and half strikes at it. While the cuckoo sits, the pipit makes no attempt to assail or dislodge it. I have used the word mesmeric of the pipit's attitude in this curious affair, for it comes so naturally to the lips here; but on the whole the idea, which the pipit's attitude has given me, has been that the bird keeps a very watchful eye on the cuckoo and sees him, or her, as the case may be, off the premises. We know that small birds mob a hawk as they mob a cuckoo: but the pipit and cuckoo affair is not quite the same thing: I have never seen a hawk attended thus by a small bird.

The hen cuckoo is said to be wooed and won by several or many husbands in the course of the season, but I have sometimes doubted whether cuckoo marriages are quite so lax as they are supposed to be. Often, on the marsh, one sees a pair of cuckoos, evidently enjoying each other's company, hunting together for caterpillars among the reeds and willow-herb; sometimes perhaps for small birds' nests, though I have never seen anything to make me think that the male cuckoo assists the female in the task of finding a nest

and of putting her egg into it. The cuckoos fly much in pairs about the marsh, and I am inclined to think that, once the female out of perhaps many suitors has chosen a mate, she remains faithful to him, or he to her, for longer than generally supposed. Some people think that cuckoos are only exceptionally seen on the ground. They are constantly on the ground, however, searching for caterpillars, and though their gait there is awkward-looking it is fully effective for their purpose. Like so many other English birds, the cuckoo will take an insect in the air: I saw a cuckoo fly off a fence by the river, capture a Mayfly which had just left the water, and return to its perch.

On the origin of the cuckoo's habit of putting her eggs into the nests of other birds, no light has been thrown. Darwin's notes on the subject are slight and unconvincing. If we examine a large number of bird's nests, each holding, besides its proper complement, an egg of a cuckoo, we find in many cases a likeness in colour or markings between that egg and the eggs of the host. Sometimes the resemblance is almost startling. Thus, there are several distinct types of the eggs of the tree-pipit; and I have been shown cuckoo eggs closely assimilating to two of these types: but it is hard to believe that there are cuckoos which are in the habit of placing their eggs in a nest holding tree-pipit eggs of a certain variety. In some cases the resemblance between the cuckoo



egg and the eggs of the host is considerable, but in others it is not so. I doubt whether in the latter case the deception is much likelier to be found out and resented by the host than in the case where there is closer resemblance. Is it true that the hedge-sparrow is a much easier dupe than the tree-pipit or the redstart? A tree-pipit, laying eggs of one variety, would, I believe, prove a safe host for a cuckoo's egg matching some other variety of egg laid by tree-pipits. There seems, for purposes of deception, no necessity for a cuckoo to lay blue eggs, if redstarts are hospitable towards the more ordinary type of cuckoo egg. Still there is the fact that cuckoo blue eggs are sometimes found in the nests of redstarts and other birds; and that in the nest holding tree-pipit's eggs of a certain well-defined variety has been found a cuckoo's egg matching this variety. As a child I duped small birds by placing in their nests eggs unlike their own in colour and marking: where the sizes matched fairly well, they proved hospitable hosts; but where there was marked disparity in size, and the host was blackbird, thrush, or jay, the fraud failed: the introduced egg was always sucked or flung out.

Before it reaches the marsh, the larger of the two streams flows through twelve or fifteen miles of idyll—idyll largely made by its own fountains. It has made villages, hiding in summer all but their church steeples among wayside elms and

sycamores; old mills, with the dead still waters of the dam sucked down and driven into the race under the great dripping wheel; pleasant farms, and parks, and manor-houses. At its source are the gravelly cress-beds. A mile below is the sixteenth-century farm-house where Izaak Walton sometimes lived and angled. This is one of the choicest scenes which the river makes from source to sea. Here, in autumn, I have seen the comma butterfly, its rich wings having a jagged edge; the swift golden gamma moth among the water mints; and on summer evenings, ghost-moths, white at dusk as the staring ox-eye daisy that never closes a lid, dart up and down, backward and forward, in endless loops and circles, over the chosen scrap of ground. If one lights a match, the sheen of their wings is clear and the yellow tippet on the back: whilst this mystic play continues, the ghost-moths are like some tiny toys dangled and danced on unseen elastic thread. Its dances ended for the night, the ghost-moth will drop among the tall meadow grasses, wind its legs round the wiry stem of one of these, and swiftly climbing to the flowering head fold its wings on its back and sleep till dusk again. The wind may buffet the grass heads together, and sway them almost to the ground with fierce gusts, but the ghost-moth is anchored safe above deadly enemies that lurk in the shorter grasses below. His is a love dance, one cannot doubt; but not every dance wins the

ghost-moth his mate. In June, too, there is another member of the family which I have seen swarming in a meadow by a wood ; the golden swift whirs among the long grasses, which it strikes and brushes in its wandering, wild career : half-a-dozen of these swifts may sometimes be seen within the space of a square yard : with them, too, the search is for love.

Mimulus and yellow-strife are in their glory in the water-meadows at the time of the ghost-moth and the golden swift. On still nights the honeysuckle and the hay fill the air with fragrance, and in gardens the syringa, lilac—more than lilac—in the weight of its scent, rules the night as the rose the day. Then, high in the downs above the river, charlock and feverfew and viper's bugloss are mingled with wild mignonette. In mid-June I have seen a fallow of the downs, its ground colour supplied by feverfew and white campion, millions of them, with great patches of this bugloss blue, beautiful as the bee larkspurs. Marshall, more than a hundred years ago, saw the charlock and the small bugloss, a load of one or the other to an acre of turnips or corn, and in his "Rural Economy of the Southern Counties" cried out against the farming which suffered it. I have seen another field ashine on a day in early June with the glossy white seeds of the dandelion, as often a field will glitter in autumn with the gossamer of the aerial spiders. Marshall saw rightly from his point of

view, though we simply must revel in the glory of colour. The best fields are those where crops and colour both make appeal to us. The heavy hay crop, near the ripening point, is dusted at the tips with the brown or purple of a myriad myriad grains of pollen. Think of it—literally millions of grains shaken by the winds out of a single grass plant, for instance, the common rye-grass; out of an acre a number past human comprehension.

Each day by the chalk stream and on the hills about it at this height of summer is twenty-four hours of sound and scent and colour of delight. It is hard to say which is better, the hum in the air at midday, or the whisper of the wind among the tree leaves at night. At ten o'clock to-night, the moon rode high, but the west sky had still the intense ethereal glow, whilst northwards lay the streaks and ribs of sullen purple. There is not one unlovely mile of the stream. In the grounds of the Caroline manor-house, it flows in several branches, and one of these, though it be but a fancy, has long seemed to me the smoothest of clear running waters that flow even in this valley of joy. You can enter the grounds of the old house by a gateway in the wall dividing the place from the church and the parsonage with the box and yew hedges. So smooth is the branch which flows under the house that even small trout of less than a pound in weight, in their flight, will make a wave as of some large,

heavy fish. When you have visited the manor-house grounds, you are always touched by the hush of the place: there are few silences of places made and tended by men more gracious than that which broods about an old English manor-house. Even about the greater country homes, where there must be many servants, a large household, the summer silence, the stillness of it, is often a feature. The striking of some large clock, the music from the rooky elms, the figures of a gardener and his men on the terraces or in the walled gardens, these never disturb the serene atmosphere of such spots. As for the manor-house, it is old English history often brought down fresh and almost intact into our anxious, striving life to-day: there we can often see the remains of the dove-cot and the apiary within the demesne; the church and parsonage adjoining; the mill hard by, where forced labour ground the lord's corn.

The old mill is a feature as essential to the shining river as the elmy village or the rest-charmed manor-house. Much of the once thriving trade of the corn-mill, it is true, has gone not to return; the uppermost mill-wheel of all on the stream has ceased to turn; others are losing their worth, as England tends less and less to grow its own bread. Still, on rivers where the water-power, in spite of the great thirsty towns, is strong, there is a livelihood for a miller in the grinding of corn for the cattle



and the smaller live-stock of the neighbouring farmsteads. Many miles down the stream from the marsh, where the water flows in broad shallows and deep pools, there is an old mill with the aroma of centuries about it. It is set in a land of enchantment, low lying but wind swept, and with the sense of spaciousness that shuts out depression. Here, as over the marsh, snipes bleat and peewits clamour, and the slow-winged heron cronks high above. There is a great succession of river-loving flowers through the summer: water-avens sprinkled all over the large meadows, here and there gathered into thick clumps; exquisite buckbean, the white blossoms tinged rose-pink; wild angelica at the river's edge; arrowhead and meadow-sweet, with such patches of the fragrant orchid in July as I have never seen even in the best spots for orchids in the chalk downs; in the evening the smell of these flowers is heavy as the very syringa's. Close to the mill lies the oozy holt on the low hill. Through it hums a brooklet, by which grow delicate ferns, pepperworts, and wood-sorrel, with umbel-bearing water-plants that make a jungle in the later summer. In the unstoried past, what is now the holt may have been the place of deposit of some untraced river, for about it lies the red gravel drift which you crunch at each step. This is where, in May when the underwood had been lately cut, the ground was covered by red campion and wild hyacinth,

sheets of rose<sup>1</sup> and sheets of blue, the blue so intense that we could see it hundreds of yards away from the other side of the stream. At this mill in the vale of flowers and bees and brimming water worked a miller with whom I struck up acquaintance. Of old the English miller seems to have been often the butt of country wit. He was sleek and prosperous in many cases, and there is a song which tells how on his death-bed he summoned his three sons and questioned each as to how he would manage to live and thrive if the property were left to him. The first was over-scrupulous for the miller's taste; the second only a little better; the third vowed that by hook or crook he would make money, and to this son went the mill. My friend bore no likeness to the miller of the song. If the soul looks through the eyes and speaks in the voice, his was white enough, I think. He was born in the district and had lived there all his days, and his Nature lore and wisdom in countryside economy formed a store I loved to draw from. This store included knowledge of bees, which he had kept for thirty years. The straw skeps were in a row by his cottage door close to the mill-race. He had enough honey in a good season for himself and

<sup>1</sup> The campion, the like of which I have never seen elsewhere—though Anne Pratt tells of such a very beautiful display in her book on wild flowers—varied between faint pink to deep rose; but the rose predominated.

family, with some over to sell. Hence there was no persuading him that the bar frame and the section crate were better than the straw skep. Only one cottager in the district had tried the new-fangled method, and even he had gone back to the straw skep. Two hives were enough to keep through the winter, and from swarms which these would send out in May or early June he would get all the honey he wanted. Some villagers declare themselves to be particularly distasteful to bees. Even a man who keeps bees, and understands a good deal of the economy of the hive, has told me there are days—it all depends on the weather, according to his theory—when he can do nothing which does not offend. Others say that if they approach a hive, without even attempting to examine it, let alone take honey, the bees will set upon them. There is truth and superstition about it: bee fear is widespread. I confess with shame that I have not learnt to overcome it quite, though I know that it is largely baseless. It is not so much the pain of the sting, fiery but slight—it is the sight and sound of the bee wild with rage that disturb one. But what men shrink from is not always rage; rather, agitation through some event that alarms or disturbs the bee. My friend at the mill knew no fear of bees. He handled his skeps freely at all times, would take them up and look into them, unprotected by a veil, without smoke to drive the workers to their honey stores. He

told me that he had never been stung, either in hiving his bees or in taking the honey at the end of the summer. The fields about the mill, with their luxuriance of grass and flowers, gave me, till I talked with the miller, the idea of a land flowing with the richest milk and honey; and indeed there is an abundance of both; but the miller, having spent a part of his life in a higher spot not far away, could tell that the best milk and honey and the best mutton come from the short, poor-looking grass of the thymy downs, rather than the lush river valley; quantity from the valley perhaps, but quality from the hills. The sward of the English uplands yields the sweeter if the sparser harvest. I used to go into the mill, and look out of one of its small windows upon the gleaming mill-dam where the great trout cruised about, drawing in the duns and Mayflies as these with gauzy wings for sails went down the gentle currents. From a mill window one sometimes has a new and surprising view of the river. It is pleasant, too, watching the white-dusted machinery at work, listening to its music. The ancient place, which with leaning wall and slanting floor looks so rickety that you might expect the whole mill to come tumbling about the ears of the workers through the jar and whirl of the machinery. The miller thought it might be fully two hundred years old, but they built in those days with great oak and in no haste. The stones to crush the wheat

were from French quarries, those for the barley from Derbyshire; and here as in other mills lying about were worn-out stones for bruising and crushing: when these were in use, milling was a brisk trade even in this quiet spot. Roller flour had not come into fashion: the old stone-ground flour held its own: the miller doubted whether it had really been improved on, for the bread in those days was sweet enough and wholesome. We have surpassed our ancestors far more in the art of making than in the article made. In some cases it seems as if the goodness of the article is in inverse ratio to the power and quickness of the machinery that makes it. In the eager race to produce food and wear, quantity at present far outstrips quality: but we are watching only the first lap or two of the race. By-and-by the common thing made will surely grow in other ways besides that of plenty and cheapness: to hold another view is to despair of progress.

I shall always associate my friend, who discoursed to me of the bees and the corn and the virtues—this was his word—of those upland pastures open to the sun and winds, with days and scenes of delicate beauty: the large May-bush, that overhung the sounding white waters of the weir, was so thick with blossom that at a little distance one could hardly see the green of it: no hidden tangled lane was fuller of birds and water-flowers than the road that led to the



mill, where the sedge-warblers sing that amazing song that lasts sometimes, at dead of night, for upwards of half-an-hour.<sup>1</sup> The man seemed to be so well placed in a land of happy things. He was wedded to the place, and in spite of poor health had happiness and pride in his work. Honest, gentle, ungrudging of labour: for a man like this, whose lot has been laid in such a spot, we expect a tolerable ending, even on the stern principle of the survival of the fittest. This was not a case of a man who had outlived his friends, and become quite lonely and unnecessary, like the ancient hermit by the marsh. He had his family and a kindly friend or two. But suddenly misfortunes accumulated. He was ailing. He lost his work at the mill, and was retired on a trifling pension to a little cottage near by. Then the man withered, his grip on life grew feebler and feebler, till one day he went to the wood and hanged himself. A more moving tragedy in the life of humble, unobserved folk it would be hard to imagine, bearing in thought the innocence, the fine sensitiveness of the man—the much he deserved—the very little he needed to end his days well.

The notion that some power with fell design

<sup>1</sup> I am not sure that this extraordinary singer is the mimic he is commonly represented to be. I have never heard a long performance from a sedge-warbler in any district, which did not include the notes which it is said he steals from the chaffinch, the sparrow, and the nightingale; these notes are as common to the sedge-warbler as they are to the other birds.

will baffle and destroy a good man is purely fantastic. To take it seriously would be to abdicate one's reason. We might as well adopt the fetish of the savage. What appals us in the spectacle of a good man, through no fault of his own, thus destroyed, is not the sense of fate, evil or other. Rather, it is the seeming absence of fate or plan. It is the idea of blind-fold chance, not fate with the shears, that strikes terror to the heart. What if all men, who lived rightly and strove hard, were utterly at the mercy of chance which overwhelmed this one—who, then, could fight with good heart? It is because they feel instinctively that, in spite of mysterious exceptions, character and will have the mastery, they can plan their future and face events.



## CHAPTER X

### IN THE VILLAGE PORTRAIT GALLERY

THERE is a saying that So-and-so knows everybody worth knowing. It is common enough in the talk of "the world": but the utterer of it has not always mere social distinction in his thoughts, and things wholly carnal, such as money and titles. It may often be applied to a clever man or woman who mixes with the famous intellects of the day—the celebrities. The saying rules out of the circle of people worth knowing the vast mass of human beings. It completely rules out the English peasantry to a man. According to this standard, none of the characters in the "Mill on the Floss" or "Scenes from Clerical Life" or "Silas Marner," who move us

to tears and smiles, would be worth knowing in real life; Shakespeare and Dickens are full of vulgar nobodies, common people whom one would not care to study. Viewed thus, the saying appears ludicrous, and yet many people do labour under the notion that only those with a handsome veneer of cultivation, or those who are more or less famous, are really interesting. Scott would be quite unintelligible to them in his saying that he had never failed to learn something from the dullest passenger in a stage-coach. Whether a person is worth knowing depends really on the knower: it is as impossible to imagine any one beneath as it is to imagine any one above the intelligence of a George Eliot or a Shakespeare. If we came to view the folk of the villages, hamlets, and solitary outlying cottages of this part of England, without sympathy, and turned from them after an incurious glance, we should find all the stolidness which tradition assigns to them; they would be sluggards in thought and action, would show no glint of humour, no originality. The infinitely varied crossplay and sport of circumstance could make no individuality among these people; they would be just sheep in a flock—though, as a fact, the old shepherd, who cannot read and does not know his age, can tell us that the most marked differences in character exist among these animals. This delusion that the average uncultivated man, the countryman especially, is not interesting would exist even

if the villages had their old abundance of workers, and no stream of young life flowed citywards. But it is increased probably by the exaggerated cry of despair that the old, strong English peasantry is dying out, and the villages left to the decayed and decrepit. The drain upon the life and strength of the country-side by the towns is a grave fact we have to face. But no end is gained by exaggerating it. Not every English village is a ruined Auburn.

What is the cause of the flow to the towns? The farm wage is higher than of old; food cheaper and more abundant; cottages on the whole are better built; health is more carefully guarded. Many lights have been thrown on this exodus, but not all illuminate it. One man lays it to education, another to the railways; some men think the cause is largely music halls and newspapers. Shut the schools and the music halls—stop the trains—prevent the circulation of the papers—and you would check the movement! But we need not look very long or closely to see that none of these things has brought about the exodus. It is half a century and more of an irresistible wave of change in thoughts, ideas, and manners of life that has led to this movement; a period which has seen the triumph of the manufacturing interest over that of the land, the coming into his right of citizenship of the field-worker. A larger, freer life, fuller of incident, has opened out



to the peasant as to other classes by the revolution, material and intellectual, of these years; it would be strange surely if he had not turned to the towns. The practical farmer, the theorist too, see ruin in the loss of these workers to the land; and indeed an enduring England without a strong peasantry is hard to imagine. But we do not all view these changes with settled gloom. Such alarms are common in history. In the old farm-house, within the manor over which my own family has been lord for generations, there is a parlour where, village tradition says, two men planned the riots against machinery many years ago. Whether the story is true or not, it is certain that people in this village, and in every part of England, imagined that the change from hand tools to machines meant ruin to their class. How greatly they deceived themselves with these fears. I do not believe in a dwindling England, country-side or town, while the spirit and strenuousness of English character keep at their present high level.

How can we pay much heed to the statements that all strength has gone from the country-side, when we watch the folk in this typical English-farming district, and find the grit and humour and delightful individuality, the dialect, and plenty of the superstitions that are racy of the soil? A long gallery indeed of portraits of the village and hamlet worthies is often before me when I think of the workers in field, wood, and common

whom I have watched. Some of the portraits in the beginning of the gallery are not quite distinctly seen from where I stand. The outline is faint. These were the figures of child days, most of them my allies in the wood pursuits. Full of earthy character and native force some of them were. The cowboy, the keeper, the general job man, the crusty gardener, the sporting gardener's-boy, with the muzzle-loading gun with the single long and crooked barrel—recalling them is like turning over the leaves of an old album, and being touched and tickled and half incredulous over the faded pictures of those whose lives were once bound up so fast with our own. Fragments of their talk, floating stories about them handed down joyfully to generations of the family of squire or parson or farmer, will bring to mind those village worthies—characters, a villager himself will call them—that have vanished. I can count on the fingers of one hand too easily the village heroes and heroines of childhood that yet linger. There is one figure I rarely miss: a woman who lives in a hamlet among elms and ash trees: who never seems to grow much older. She has lived in the same cottage as long as I can remember. Passing the place sometimes, I see her in the garden or drawing water at the well. Of the folk in that particular hamlet she alone belongs to the enchanted time of childhood. She has become as much a part of the scene as the line of ash trees

by the roadside. The rest in that hamlet are strangers. They are no links in the chain of my past. Some of the new cottages are good, but they recall nothing. One old one has been added to and improved past recognition. In it lived the little old lady who used to help me with the butterflies. The Camberwell beauty butterfly was found on the lavender bush at her door. She outlived a family, a generation, almost a neighbourhood of people, keeping till very near the end her mind bright and heart aglow. A little before life flickered out, I went up to see her. "I am waiting for death," she said with a gentle smile; "I think it is very near now—dying quite quietly and peacefully, you see." I have never seen such unfaltering spiritual faith in any believer as was here; such strength in weakness. This is rarer than the bluster of faith, the strong man fighting the fear of the end.

There is an inclination, when we recall the delightful village figures that have vanished, to say that none of the folk are so good as they were. But in reality many a gap is filled by a fresh figure of worth; and it is this which makes me feel that the pessimists are not in the right. Are all the strong young men gone to the towns? Many have gone and will go; but those that remain are not all weaklings. Even in the very small villages and the hamlets one finds them. A little before I wrote this the young stalwart of

the hamlet by the marsh came to mow the small water-meadow. The crop was heavy and the midsummer sun burned hot. He did not begin to work till three in the afternoon; by dark the last swath of grass went down before his whetted scythe, and the edges and corners of the field had been cleared of the tufts of sedge and rank river-side vegetation. In the strong even sweep of the young mower were the rhythm, the perfect harmony of physical labour. His fine arms were bared, his shirt was loose and open about his chest to allow of the free play of the muscles. To the patience and the splendid endurance of field labour were added a suppleness of limb and a grace of action we might associate with some statue of a Greek god. The young mower is the type of complete physical manhood; happy in his strength and staying power, but not spoilt by the loud applause which is won by the doer of show feats. He is a woodman, too, and can give a good account of himself at thatching and other farm work. All physical labour which he undertakes he carries through with the same force and thoroughness.

But physical strength, with the grace that is born of it, is not the sole virtue of the aristocracy of the village worker. It is inconceivable that any one with experience of the English peasant of the south country can deny that there is brain as well as brawn in many a worker. Slow workers, alike in mind and body, are of course common

enough, too common for our small store of patience. But wherever I have gone, I have found shepherds, carters, woodmen, who are well able to help themselves and their masters, by plan as well as by strength and endurance. The all-round peasant worker is no rare product of the English village and hamlet. The young mower, who can thatch and hedge and do wood-work of various kinds, is one of many village labourers as useful as himself in these and other crafts. His knowledge of what things should be done about a house, a wood, or a farm, does not come from severely logical reasoning, I grant; and it is not likely to be based on what we term science: it may be partly rule of thumb, partly instinctive—the fruit of the practice of generations of workers on the spot. But it is idle to deny it the name of intelligence. These men can often turn their energies with success to field and village tasks which they have never attempted before, and in which they have received no instruction. There must be head work here, and only the ungenerous or pretentious critic would despise it. It is not hard to match the young mower of the hamlet as village handy man, if I cast my thoughts over a list of peasant workers in a few of the villages round about. Several, as capable as he, though, as it happens, none so athletic, occur to me at once, all living and striving at the present time. There is the retired village railway worker, signalman for a long space of years, who is as



efficient in the garden and the outhouse as he would have been, had he turned his hands and mind to it, on the farm, or in the park or woodlands. There is the gamekeeper, who was a fine hurdler—if a little too quick of hand to be absolutely first in this craft—and who, I doubt not, could farm on a small scale with profit, if he had the chance. A third began in a very small village shop, then went into the wood-dealing business, and is now succeeding with a farm he has scraped together acre by acre, sticking at the same time to his former traffic. A fourth spent his youth in sheep shearing in June, and woodwork the rest of the year, and has now started farming one or two stony, weedy fields, out of which he will make a small profit. Such men are indeed of the aristocracy of peasant life, but the ranks of this order are larger than many people suppose. Yet it is the most exclusive of aristocracies: no one can be born in it; no one can be added to it by kings and governments. It is self-made: on its proud coat-of-arms are character, will-power, self-respect. I admit that the qualities which go to the making of an independent Englishman of this class do not include all the benevolent ones. Charity, the choicest and rarest, is not always a quality of the man who, striving hard and honestly, makes his way over the rough places of life. He may see the faults of his neighbour, of members of his family less strong-willed than himself, in a

harsh light. Charity, unless it be of the kindly form which some people inherit with the disposition, may only come by reasoning and by viewing men and their actions in a certain detached spirit. We only discover those whom we disapprove of to be not worse than ourselves, to be perhaps a little better than ourselves, when we view them with detachment, peer into the hidden background of life, take environment into the account. There is no time for the greatly striving man to think deep and weigh with fine scales. The touch of uncharity, which is sometimes to be noted in the sturdy, upright countryman who has worked his way to independence, is not a lovely defect: it is unchristian; it cannot be the mark of high intelligence. But there are shining qualities, without which a State cannot thrive, that go to the making of his success. There is the master-will, the long, stern battling against difficulties, sometimes the holding together and upraising, by effort and example, of a whole family. The man will not stoop from his self-respect. Even as a dependant, whilst living solely on the wage of one employer, he is recognised as a man with the seed of independence. He pays court to nobody; very far removed from homage is the attitude of firm respect in which the good countryman stands towards his employer: where homage lowers the payer of it, respect raises him.

It is sometimes said of these village worthies

who have made, by years of toil, by the skill and economy of their housewives—for the woman will play quite as important a part as the man—a small competency, that they are “inclined to be too independent.” There may now and then be a slight parade of independence. But to be beholden to nobody—it is a fine boast! A touch of vanity may be forgiven in such men if in any. Independence which a man has not won for himself is nothing to be proud of; and it may be a bane more than a blessing. The independence that does its possessor honour is that which has come through self-discipline. It is a curious fact that independence and discipline, almost contrary states, are two of the great blessings of life; the former so often won by a rigorous course of the latter.

The years of discipline are those during which the worker lives by the wage alone, and cannot be truly described as his own master. Independence is reached when, by dint of saving little sums, by shrewd investment, at first in a pig perhaps, a cow, by-and-by a cottage, a small village shop, a few lots of under-wood each year, in the end, some fields near home, the man and his wife can at length stand alone. A bit here, a bit there, as the opportunity occurs: there is no wiseacre plan about the way in which he does it. It comes about very much as our Empire and Constitution have.

These successful village careers do not always

end in land. I would they did. There would be little need to feel uneasy about the future of the English country-side if this strong class could be established widely on the land. But from time to time cases do occur where the farm-worker or the village adventurer or handy man ends a farmer. The long period of farming failure has given such men a better chance than they had of old, for in some districts there are owners and even small capitalists who are ready to help them to farms, or portions of farms, that fall vacant through the ruin of the old school of farmers.

At the outskirts of the village, in the narrow valley of a bourne, six miles from the market-town, lies a farm called Thriving, on which tenant after tenant had spent his hopes and capital. All told, its acres are under two hundred, I believe, yet so light was the land, or so half-hearted the efforts by tenants who thought to make a living out of it after wheat had sunk under thirty shillings a quarter—under twenty for a time—that the owner in despair at length granted a lease to four brothers, simple working villagers. Tradition says that before this family took the farm in hand,<sup>1</sup> it had some ten tenants in less than twenty years. The brothers clubbed and kept house together, and divided the work

<sup>1</sup> Their father, who had also been an ordinary working villager, rented the land for a while before them : he began farming two or three acres.

into regular departments. One was the "scholar of the family:" he kept the books. The inspector had declared him to be much the sharpest lad in the village school a few years before. He was the married man of the family, and his wife kept house until the old farm building, with its good walled-in garden, was let apart from the land. The brothers by their own unaided labour farmed the land: they paid no labour bill: they were their own ploughmen, sowers, harvesters, shepherds, carters. Then the land became clean, the hedges trim, the cattle fit. At the same time they contrived to do a little wood-trading and to run a carrier's business. Whence the capital came for the start many guessed but few could really tell: it must have been so small as hardly to deserve the name of capital. One of the family, a few years before the farm was taken, lifted himself above the ranks of the farm-worker by hiring out to neighbouring farmers a threshing machine; but the money he made thus must have been passing small to start farming even a couple of hundred acres on. Strictest sobriety, an unsullied name, the stern will to rise, unstinted labour: these stood, no doubt, for the bulk of their capital. But these alone, even granted the lease of the land, could hardly make for a sure success. These brothers had the farming instinct in their family. If you had set down a man educated at the best college of farming science and given him the capital, he might, probably



would, have lost where these men won. Born in the midst of hard farming for a livelihood, never moving for length of time out of their native district, there are some workers who unconsciously get into that intimate touch with the soil which means so much in this pursuit. I half fancy there is a kind of masonry between the soil and the elect of those who till it, the secret of which no one has ever revealed. Higher up the little valley, still further from railway station and market-town, is a much larger farm of six hundred acres or thereabouts, that brought in small profit to College, which owns it, and seemed likely a few years ago to run to couch. The large ancient farm-house was once the manor-house of the place; important, no doubt, and prosperous in old days. The farm fell vacant, and two young men from a neighbouring village persuaded the owners to grant them a lease. Their capital must have been amazingly small for the venture. One of them had perhaps saved a trifle out of the small village trading he had been engaged in, but the sum at the disposal of the partners can hardly have amounted to hundreds. I know that they strove hard to get somebody of substance in the district to guarantee for the seed, which must be sown if they got a lease of the land. By hook or crook they got the land, and by unceasing toil established themselves, so that in a few seasons they could actually be pointed to as farmers who

were making a small profit out of the land. A portion of the farm was down in sainfoin, that bountiful crop of the chalk down and valley, which, lasting for several seasons, gave them a better chance of dealing—short-handed in labour, ill equipped in cattle and machinery—with the plough land ; but the out-going tenant had to be paid for this sainfoin which he left. How did these men overcome the difficulties which might well have staggered many an old hand at farming, with a thousand pounds at his bank ? They were lucky adventurers, it may be suggested, with nothing to lose. But they had everything to lose—the opportunity of a life-time. If it is luck to have the will and the grit and the foresight to seize the chance, theirs was luck indeed. But such successes seem to me to be as far removed from luck as any in the world. This is the true character success : and the character success in the most ancient and honourable of all the great industries of men is splendid to consider. The men who win their hard way, unpampered by the State, owing nothing to patronage, are a great part of the backbone of England. In their years of unflinching fight, they are wrapt up in themselves, their efforts, and ambitions. Selfishness is a characteristic of their career ; but it is not, I think, very often that a man is striving solely for his own wants in the present, and comfort with even a little power in the future years. The family bond is strong, and the State thrives

in proportion as the family thrives. The English family is the State in microcosm.

This worker, then, concentrates on the family self: for this he practises without ceasing the envied art to make two blades of grass grow where one blade grew before he came to the soil. He has no appetite for lighter amusement than that of the plough, the wain, or the machine cutter. His literature is the weekly paper; his society, outside the small village group in which he is concerned, consists of a few farmers and dealers met at the town each market-day, where he takes his samples of corn, or perhaps himself drives by road, six or seven miles of hilly country, the pigs or sheep. If he has a luxury, it is a pipe during the little space between the end of the long day's work and bed. Strong drink in any quantity is practically out of the question; the heavy drinker may sometimes be a hard worker; but he cannot rise to independence in this competition. Patriotism is best served in the long run among such workers by each man attending to the welfare of his own family, winning the way by steadfast industry to independence in life. This is the master passion. But the vaguer patriotism, the nation sense, which, with most of us, must be expressed rather by word of mouth than by labour, inspires our country folk with strong feeling in times of national stress. There is no fastidious examination of the merits of the case where a quarrel with a

foreign nation has been entered into. Our country, right or wrong, is the attitude of the folk at the farm and in the cottage alike. It is the real stuff in generous measure, served out when the heart is stirred, and at no other time. It is the only patriotism of mouth or pen which is worth much. Imagine the plight of the statesman who depended on the patriotism of the pedants. But this good Anglo-Saxon spirit, as ardent now among the folk of the villages and hamlets as in the time of Pitt or Elizabeth, is not of the lips only. I remember that one of the very men, whose rise from simple villager to farmer I have been thinking of, made without grudging his contribution to the fund for the reservists' families during the war. The motive of the giver in a case of this kind is quite above suspicion. There is small thought in a man like this, a working man as he still styles himself with "proud humility," to stand well with the folk who organise such subscriptions. He has no social status or ambitions to subscribe up to; moreover, half a crown or five shillings is a heavy call on his purse. But the money is given with a blunt word or two. Such a giver does not look to see his name on printed lists or church doors. He pays out his shillings as a matter of duty, and there is an end of it.

I have read plans, wise on paper, to teach the village children at a tender age how good the country scenes are, how far better it is to live

amid the trees and streams, birds and flowers, than to breathe the tainted air of the towns. But a profound and natural movement, such as this flow of life citywards, could not be arrested by doses of school medicine, even granted the skilled physician in each village school. Taste for the country calm is not in the bulk of the young folk, the boys and girls who are nearing man and woman hood: the glitter of the crowd allures them. The pleasure fairs, with the booths, sweetmeats, wrestling shows, and merry-go-rounds, still features of some of the farming towns and larger villages in autumn, fascinate the young people of the country-side and many an elder too. Till near midnight on Saturday I have known the music ground out, with little slackening in the delight. And in the city it is always fair day to their imagination. It is much the same allurements that draws a rich and leisured class to the London season in the choicest of the May and June days, to four months of pleasure fair. But among those villagers who are not drawn away, there is often an understanding of the value of woods and fields, untainted air, and the country calm. It comes slowly to the tongue; it is fused in the being, and subconscious perhaps. A few words of praise about a garden or a sunset, or a refreshing shower, is commonly the limit of its expression. On the edge of a wood, at a spot of large oaks and green sward, in a lane of paradise to me, lives one of



the worthiest of them all. This man has the unyielding way which is needed for the struggle up to independence, the unwearying industry, sobriety and self-respect. He rose from the ranks of his class as a young man, and his progress has hardly been checked at times, as so often<sup>v</sup> it is even in the case of the steadiest. But there was one mistake that might have spoilt his life, except for the swift remedy. Making a good and sure living for himself and family, and filling an honourable post in wood work, to our surprise he took one day a strange step: flung up his work, and migrated with his family and all his goods to the town. He settled in a little house there, and had a mind to trade. The town, six miles from his native place, has grown a little since first I knew it, and may now have a population of several thousands. One has always looked on it as a small, quiet market-town, on the whole prospering. But life in this place was too crowded and loud to suit our friend. He was worried by the noise of the wheels and the feet on the paving stones; he could not bear the ways of the town folk. So no more city life for him. Within one week of his arrival at the town the furniture was packed and carted back, and the man was looking for work again about the well-loved village. Among the woods and fields which he knew so well, he felt in his element, his equilibrium was restored. Of course for weeks to come he and his folk could only

expect to be the butts of the village humourists. Fancy how often the aggravating question may have been put to them, how had they liked town life? and how was it they had come back so soon? But the wit was lived down, and ere long our friend found his chance of good work once more, and soon made up what ground he had lost. I never have doubted that this man, with all his hard business instinct, has feeling for the country scenes, that there is an intimacy between him and the commons and woodways where his strenuous days of dawn to dark are spent. Double his money profits, give him a taste of the luxuries of life, he would never breathe free or live happy away from these dear, familiar scenes, the green of the woods and the clear air of the hills. The glamour of the earth is strong for him.

The constant striving for his own has not blunted the humane feelings in this case. It could not be said, as it often is of men with inflexible character, that here is a good man but hard. I have known him quietly give a helping hand to those who have no claim upon him through blood-relationship or family. He took the pledge simply to induce a fellow-villager, infirm of will, to do likewise. There is a soft place in his heart for sufferers, and rare tenderness for his dog. These are the ornaments of character, the pendants of the sterner virtues. Finally, this is the type of man in whom the

family to which he stands in a kind of free-feudal relation could always place entire faith in times of illness or grave anxiety. Loyalty and sense of responsibility are never stronger in such a man than at a crisis. The trustworthy serving man—no portrait in the picture gallery of country life appeals to me more than his.

The poor of the village, those who are mere workers for a master, are, I think, kindlier to each other in trouble than more prosperous classes. There is a freemasonry of the humble. Small benefits pass freely from cottager to cottager in pain or grief. Sometimes we find brave acts in the last folk to whom we might look for heroism. One of the thatched cottages in a hamlet amid the corn lands took fire, and was burnt before the engine could be brought from the town, a few miles distant. In a group of folk, who stood watching without, was the old woman who had lived in the place. She fretted over the loss of her watch, which, in the alarm of fire, she had left in her bedroom. The roof was in flames, and might fall any moment, must fall in a matter of minutes. One could hardly expect even a brave man to go on such an errand of peril. But among the watchers was a woman who lived a lonely striving life in a cottage near by. She could not bear the thought of her old aunt grieving over the watch which she knew was valued on sentimental grounds. She recognised fully the extreme risk of entering the cottage, but

without hesitation ran up the garden and in under the flames. It was the work of perilous seconds to reach the inner room through the smoke and find the watch. A minute or two after she had emerged, the roof, a sheet of fire, fell in. We had always credited this woman with blunt integrity, and with warmth of heart in spite of the stolid look and manner. A possible heroine we had not imagined in her. Nobody seems to have taken much note of this act: perhaps some villagers exclaimed about it for a few minutes, and then it passed out of mind. The most unselfish deeds and the keenest sufferings are so often obscure—like the heroism of the rank and file that fell on Newbury field, of whom, as Gardiner says, history in her haste takes no account.

That hamlet of the corn land and the hazel coppices with its church, schoolhouse, and tiny shop of all wares, lies on an easy road to the town: so that perhaps village characters or originals are not so likely to be found there as they were in the large village under the steep hanger in my childhood days, or as they are to-day in the hamlet by the marsh. This is the hamlet by the shining river, where lived the solitary who worked till ninety years of age, and the scarcely less ancient couple next door who died within a few hours of each other. And here the meadow grass went down before the scythe of the young mower. It has neither church nor schoolhouse, and is a stiff walk from the market

town. A sixth, at least, of its men and women cannot read or write: I remember the shepherd could not when last I inquired, though he was only thirty-six, and therefore had not been born in schoolless days. Old James is clearly so remote from scholarship that one would hardly ask the question about him. In many of these hidden hamlets and villages there is an original, or a character as fellow-workers describe him, much of the type of old James. This is far from the type of man who rises above the class of farm-worker hired at Michaelmas by a sum of money, a premium, paid down to clinch a bargain for one year's labour. Rather he is below this class; has no family to support, and lives the purely hand-to-mouth life. An odd job here, an odd job there, a bit of victuals commonly supplied by those who hire him, and a hay-loft or cattle outhouse for his sleeping quarters; this is his way of life. It is a very light bundle of property he need cumber himself with when he shifts his quarters; and there will be a very few shillings in his pocket, for James, though not a drunkard, is a hard drinker of beer: he begins on beer when most of us are thinking of breakfast, and goes on steadily with it till bed-hour: he can manage a couple of gallons where an unseasoned beer-drinker could not one quart. James, though all unlettered, has collected as much wisdom as he needs for his manner of life. You might not credit this odd, knotty old fellow with a taste for



wild flowers, but he has been quick to find that two or three people who come to the hamlet are fond of a bouquet, and he has marked the spots where the choicest and scarcest grow. One beautiful July bouquet which he gathered contained flowers that we had never seen during our rambles about the hamlet. There were dropwort, its creamy buds tinged with pink; dyer's green weed; rampion; and marsh helleborine, each blossom shining with a bead of honey. In this kind of villager one looks for bits of weather wisdom, though it is no monopoly of his. The village weather authority founds his theories on no scientific basis, and his belief that the phase of the moon must guide one in prophecies is greatly discredited to-day. Yet the lore of some of these villagers is useful for local purposes, no matter how they come by it. It is, I believe, largely borne in on them by years and years of experience in the same valley or range of downs. The movements of birds and various animals, the flowering and fruiting of plants and trees, and many other small things, are brought to bear on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Error and superstition can be traced in many of these village predictions of weather, but there is an accumulation of local fact and observation, which inspires some of them, that cannot be scoffed at by a wise man. Growing

<sup>1</sup> Johns, in his book on trees, gave one delightful bit of weather wisdom: "I think there will be rain," said a little girl, "for the weather tree is showing its white lining."

vain of our progress, we might discard old truth tested by long, simple experience, together with the error. I am quite sure that many of the village weather authorities are well worth consulting, if we are content with prophecies for a day or half a day ahead: theirs is the way largely of tradition: a thousand old English saws and rhymes, still employed, about clouds, sunsets and dawns, rainbows and halos, and the songs and movements of birds and beasts, attest to this: but it is mingled with a great deal of slow, careful observation by generation after generation of countrymen. It is by his own observation that the woodman or field-worker tells the time of day without the great old turnip watch, the shepherd the time of night when the sky is clear. It is this kind of observation that to-day we scarcely trouble to make for ourselves: we buy it ready-made instead, to our loss.

Village lore includes knowledge of many things besides the weather and the seasons. There is the village pharmacopœia with its confusion of superstition, harmless remnants of witchery, and genuine cure or preventive. The days of the herbalist are over for ever, happily; but there is something very attractive in the idea of curing lesser ailments by centaury tea or dandelion. A hundred herbs grow near any country door, which could still be used for food or simple medicine: knowledge of these things is still found here and there among our village folk, but it is less

distributed than of yore. As for the roots of wild plants once used for food, an abounding supply of daily bread made from corn has caused our people to forget them completely, and we must admit that the times when the English peasant was driven to these were evil for the poor. But I still have a fancy for a taste of cowslip wine made from the flowers that blossom on the beech hanger: and I would have it distilled and bottled by the careful village dame, who prescribed for the petty ills of our childhood: hers was a treasure-house of hoarded tradition as to herb and root in wild and garden.

No wonder a village among the hills sometimes has its authority on the subject of wells and springs, considering how much the difficulty of getting abundance of good water affects the cottagers in dry seasons. The authority in some places has noticed that the springs of the village wells rise after certain gales early in the year. He does not trouble to seek the cause, but turns to account his experience by not clearing out his well, the water of which has become low and thick, when these winds blow; he knows that soon the springs must rise and the water clear. There was a well adventurer in a neighbouring hamlet quite famous. He was the only man who dauntlessly went down our well, several hundred feet deep, and one other of great depth in the neighbourhood. He was lowered on a swing seat, two men at the windlass, taking with

him his bag of tools in case the machinery needed repair, and one or two dip candles. This man had worked in the well before the house was built, and he had a stock of moving tales about his adventures in its trough. Once a man working at the top let fall a bag of screws, which just missed him. At another time, whilst he was at the bottom of the well, two fellow workers, by a blunder, the nature of which I have forgotten, got an engine over the mouth, could not move it away, and had no supports within reach to place under it. There were then no iron rods and landing-places in the well: in a minute or so, the strength of the men above failing, the engine must fall upon the doomed man, unless help came. The place was in a wood, a mile fully from the nearest cottage. But the despairing call for aid of the two men was heard by a man who chanced to be passing. He ran to the rescue, and with two stout poles, fetched from the under-wood near by, made the necessary support. A minute later, and no aid could have availed, for the endurance of the men holding the engine was at an end. Thus the well adventurer, in my childhood the hero of pipes and valves and red lead, was saved as by a miracle. How full he ever was of fact and figure about the rise and fall of the springs! But he was no water dowser: I think he had small sympathy with ways of divination not his own. His was not the stolid temperament by many associated with our peasantry in the

bulk. The stolid villager is typical, but far from universal. Nervous energy is a characteristic of some of the men I have known who have raised themselves above the state of farm-workers.

Clodhopper and Chawbacon : with these names the farm-workers have been branded in the flock. There is a measure of brutal truth in them, taking the class as a whole and superficially ; as there is in representing the Englishman a worshipper of beef and beer, or the American a worshipper of Mammon. It is the same spirit of description as that which puts a knife into the hand of the Italian. It is a common delusion, the result partly of these names—chawbacon, yokel, clodhopper—that the villager has no sense of humour. But he has often a strong sense of it, which is shown in dry sayings, striking and nearly always with the impress of originality. Many years ago John Akerman made a collection of the wisdom and humour of the Wiltshire peasant, who is looked on as the most benighted and dull-witted of the countrymen. He recorded the stories and sayings of one William Little, and there is not a page of his little book which does not, in the faithful rendering of the peasant dialect, and in the frame of mind and turn of expression, recall the folk of the hamlets about our home. Shrewd and simple thoughts are oddly mingled in their talk and calculation. A suspicion of book-learned theory that does not go well with the observations



of themselves and their forefathers can often be detected. At rare times it flashes out in a denial of anger. A west countryman gave me reminiscences of his father concerning the Isle of Wight peasantry among whom he had lived for eighty-eight years. Rambling in idyllic scenes about Ryde one day, he came to a barn where a man was threshing. He sat down and, entering into talk, spoke presently about the earth going round the sun. At this the worker lost patience, and broke out harshly against such theory. "Wen I come here this marnen a-dreshen, the sun sheened into this door, and now et sheens into that, an' I knaws th' barn ant moved." He told me a tale from the same source, which shows another quality of the peasantry in the same part of the country, that of genuine wit. Two labourers met as they went to work in the early morning, a hunchback and a one-eyed man. The one-eyed man said to the hunchback: "Marnen, Tammass, I zee ye got yer load on yer back betimes." The hunchback retorted: "Well, I spooase 'tis a bit yarly, vor I zee ye only got one winder shetter open." No one who has lived among these village people and studied their ways and words can doubt that there is a wit in some field-workers who to the unsympathising stranger seem so inert of mind. The banter which passes from one to another in a group of elderly workers has not finish or fine point, but is effective: the image and simile,

based always on familiar things of the country life, make sure appeal. The stronghold of the peasant wit and wisdom is that remoter hamlet or village, where little change takes place in the occupation of the people, where the old dialect remains strong, and the names are much the same as in our childhood. Here the peasant strain is kept pure. High among the folds of the hills, and down in the river valley, there are these hamlets around us to-day. Men live all their lives in the same place, follow the same occupation. In one hill village the inn has been kept by the same landlord for over fifty years: in another the parish clerk has been at his post for thirty-five years: before him his father filled it for forty years: his grandfather for twenty-one years. In the hamlet by the marsh, and even in the neighbouring elmy village on the highway, much of the old remains. There is plentiful Anglo-Saxon in the speech, many words or forms of words confined now to the peasant tongue. The mower is still encouraged by some of the farmers, and there was talk of using one of the great gabled barns in winter for the flail, so that each day there would be freshly threshed straw for the cattle. Even the harvest festival is kept up with the old heart in a hamlet here and there. In one place the farmer killed a sheep against the supper: a great plum-pudding followed the meat, then cheese and beer and tobacco; and, for the dancing in the barn, half

the hamlet, even folk who do not work on the farm, came in.

In such scenes we have the real thing, men and women racy of the soil, the peasant character in its full force of good and evil, the sound and the seamy. I do not blind myself to the seamy side of country life in England, the side of the wastrel, the unthrifty, the overwhelmed by ill fortune—that leads from the ruined or lack-lustre life to the workhouse and the pauper's grave: nor do I care to scale the good against the ill in bulk, and to say the good prevails greatly. I only know that I have found, blended with the ill, very much that is whole and strong in the character of our peasantry, native force in ploughman and shepherd and harvester, the upholding spirit of self-respect, and of independence or liberty without which complete manhood is never realised. Thoughts of these shining qualities, and of the open-air lives of the upright men of the hamlets, go well with the sound of birds and waters, the lulling hush of the secret wood, the form and perfume of wild flowers, and all that makes for the glory and glamour of the earth.







**Boston Public Library**  
**Central Library, Copley Square**

**Division of**  
**Reference and Research Services**

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.

Please do not remove cards from this pocket.





